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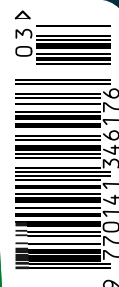


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WHY WE USED THE F-WORD

IT'S GOOD TO KNOW THAT YOU CARE. When we published an article in February called *Away From the Grind*, in which Jo Caird wrote about what it was like to dive in the Faroe Islands, I expected a reaction, but the online protest started as a trickle and soon became a flood.

The Faroe Islands are small, and apart from being easy to beat at football are known for one thing – the *grindadráp*, the regular event in which islanders slaughter pilot whales. Our critics felt that the article condoned the killing, and that by publishing it we were telling you to go and dive there regardless.

Well, I'm not about to defend the *grindadráp*. On a personal level I agree with you all. I wouldn't want to dive in the Faroe Islands, and I have written in this column before about what I regard as one of those barbaric practices that masquerade as preservation of "culture".

What is at issue, however, is **DIVER's** right to publish an article on diving in any part of the world, and whether by publishing we are endorsing a location.

When we arrange our own visits to a destination, we give warning that we will report as we find, and will be under no obligation to provide a varnished account.

In this case Jo Caird told us that she was visiting the Faroes and planned to see what the diving was like. As I knew little about the place apart from its primitive attitude to animal rights, I was intrigued to see what she would find.

I did tell Jo that she must take the *grind* into account when she wrote the article, but had no idea how the trip would turn out. Jo, a professional journalist, reported on her personal experience objectively as she saw it.

Had she come back with a more negative feature we would have published that one, because we owe nothing to the Faroes. Regular readers know that **DIVER** cares passionately about animal rights, but equally we care about human rights to free expression, and won't gag our correspondents.

We also know that you're well able to make up your own minds on these matters. Jo may have found the positives, but frankly I would be surprised if many divers were moved to follow in her footsteps.

As it happens, the article was followed in the February issue by one about Japan, another country associated with slaughtering dolphins and whales. We didn't address that aspect in this instance because the article was specifically about seahorses, and we have had no complaints about it.

The sad truth is that it would be all too easy to find persuasive political reasons not to visit so many of the countries in which we all dive, including some of our favourites.

I'm sorry people were upset by the Faroes article, but perhaps it's no bad thing that the issue has been highlighted again. Next month Rob Read of Sea Shepherd, who has had long cutting-edge experience of campaigning against the *grindadráp*, gives us the Faroes story from his perspective.

I'm glad that you care, and I hope you are in no doubt that we care too.



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GIVE GREAT BRITAIN A GO!

You might be sitting on a plane reading the latest copy of **DIVER** while heading off to warm waters to dive. You might be heading home after completing your Open Water course, energised after falling in love with the underwater world.

Or you might be at home dreaming of warm waters and sun. Wherever you are, if you're a warmwater diver then the lure of UK waters may have bypassed you.

For 10 years I was a warmwater diver, and committed to remaining so, completing the IDC only to become an instructor in the UK because I couldn't get the dates abroad to tie up with school-holiday dates.

After a change in my personal life that restricted my freedom to travel abroad, I decided to give UK diving a go. I booked in for a drysuit course and, I have to say, hated it!

A small leak meant that I emerged from my first dive lacking feeling in my extremities and a serious concern that I'd lost a few bits.

From not having to worry about my buoyancy I'd been plunged into cold water, weighed down by all the extra kit that comes with dark and cold diving, and the inability to put on my own fins.

A year later and I'm a committed UK diver and would go out every weekend if I had the time.

I called a local dive club and went along. A divemaster took me under his wing and we went out to Wraybury so that I could get used to the drysuit I'd picked up secondhand and work on my buoyancy.

It was a trip to Plymouth that convinced me that UK diving was worth it. I love the Red Sea and had travelled there seven times in the past year but the life in the UK water rivalled anything I'd seen there. But what was more appealing was the wreck-diving, and it is this that has continued to inspire new trips and visits.

After diving in the UK I have undoubtedly become a better warmwater diver. I am more aware of the behaviour of the sea, my buoyancy has improved beyond recognition and my confidence has increased.

I have become far more self-reliant, building a little toolkit and learning how my kit works rather than giving a shout for someone else on the boat to come along and resolve an issue.

Knowing my equipment has improved decision-making under water, and I'm a safer diver, and a better instructor, as a result.

I still have to learn more about the tides and how our seas work; it's vastly different from the easy days of loading the boat and leaving the rest to the captain. The other big difference in warmwater diving is accessibility. I've generally travelled alone and turned up to different spots around the world and hopped on a boat, being buddied up with groups on board. In Hurghada I'd guided dives and had a different experience with my diving.

In the UK I found it a little

harder work but, luckily, found myself a great club with active divers of all abilities, and who, most importantly, were willing to buddy up so that I could build experience in the UK.

Over time I've met other divers and, now that I'm more at home in the sea, I feel confident to use buddy groups on social media.

So if you're a warmwater diver my advice would be to book into a drysuit course, call a club and plunge in. The UK has some of the richest dive opportunities in the world.

It might not always be glorious blue water and brightly coloured fish, but it is a great experience. I'll still warmwater-dive, but this year's goals? Scapa Flow, Farne Islands and a bit of Channel wreck-diving.

MARYSE DARE, COULSDON, SURREY



ALEX KHACHADOURIAN

Colour of Faroes water

Having read **DIVER** since 1999, this is the first time I have felt compelled to write in. Regarding Jo Caird's article *Away from the Grind* (February), I find it incredible that Jo expects divers to forget the *grind* and have a wonderful time diving in the Faroes.

As divers it is our responsibility to help protect the very place we spend our most pleasurable moments. Travelling to the Faroes without actively protesting their murder of cetaceans is of no help to

this cause. You could compare Jo's article to the Kennel Club promoting a dog show in a Chinese town more commonly known for holding a large canine meat market.

I think **DIVER** has fallen well away from my expectations, all because, and I presume, of a free jolly offered from the Faroes to write about how wonderful the place is when they are not in international news for blood-red water.

SHAUN NOTLEY

I was horrified to read your article endorsing going to the Faroes and a very sympathetic view of the abhorrent slaughter of cetaceans that occurs on this island. I will never buy or read articles from your magazine again and I hope you hang your head in shame regarding the above endorsements.

I am truly disgusted that you would try to normalise or ignore these heinous atrocities against whales and dolphins.

MRS UNDERWOOD

I can only point you to your news item from last July about the slaughter. I used to enjoy your magazine, and lately your online version. Perhaps you ought to support the Japanese and their whale hunts as well. I am so disappointed, I cannot tell you how much!

ANNE HUDSON, PENARTH

As an avid reader of your magazine for the last nine years, I was disgusted to see that you had published an article on the Faroe Islands in a positive light.

As divers, it's our job to protect the oceans, not participate in accepting outdated, brutal and



barbaric practices to intelligent sentient beings. The article to me almost swept it aside, and made light of the *grind* as it's a great unspoiled place to dive in the Faroes.

Sometimes in life you have to take a stand for what you believe in, and I think you should be ashamed by your company's acceptance to print a positive article, and encourage people to go there. It needs a worldwide boycott to explain to the Faroes that they need to change their ways.

Jo's article made my blood boil, and if she can watch videos of the *grind* and not think of it as diabolically cruel and pointless she has no place in the dive world.

DAVID GUSSMAN

Editor's Comment: We have taken on board your heartfelt concerns (see *First In*). I can assure you that **DIVER** has not suddenly become anti-wildlife after all these years, nor did we arrange this trip at the instigation of the Faroe Islands.

These letters arrived very late in this month's production cycle, but next month I hope those who were upset will feel that we are redressing the balance when Rob Read, Chief Operations Officer of Sea Shepherd UK, provides the front-line view of the Faroes cetacean slaughter.

Packages & bracelets

I recently enjoyed a couple of weeks diving in Cozumel, Mexico. It was my first time on the island, and I had pre-booked and paid for dives with Pro-Dive along with accommodation at the Occidental Allegro hotel.



My wife is a non-diver so, in the interests of a harmonious holiday, some days are usually devoted to excursions and activities of a non-diving nature.

It came as a surprise to find that I was expected to dive every day. If I missed a day and wanted to dive twice the following day, this counted as an extra dive and was invoiced accordingly!

Most of the reef system around Cozumel falls within the National Marine Park. To finance the protection of the park there is an additional charge of US \$2 per day per diver. Proof of payment is a single-use wristband to be worn by the diver and marked with the day's date.

Pro-Dive's customers paid these park charges in advance, and on their first dive were issued with a "non-dated" wristband.

Pro-Dive staff said they wanted to encourage recycling, so asked us not to remove the band at the end of the day. They even offered to supply a larger band that could slip over the hand when one customer suggested that he really didn't want to wear it at night.

Perhaps it really is keen on recycling, and perhaps all the fees do go to the marine park, but nothing I heard or saw during my two-week stay helped me come to that conclusion.

JOHN YARROW, TRURO, CORNWALL

Markus Fleischmann, Pro Dive International comments: *Guests booking the Allegro Cozumel can book a room with the hotel and an additional dive package with us, and are free to schedule the dives as required.*

An alternative is the "Ultimate Dive Experience", a good-value all-inclusive option that includes one dive per day as part of the room package. Because this dive is part of a hotel package, it is correct and logical that it should not be transferable to other days, other people and so on.

If clients don't like this rule, they can simply reserve a room and book the diving separately.

The bracelet comment is unfair. It suggests that we deliberately charge customers fees that we never pay to the Cozumel marine park. In fact we make a big deal of ensuring that all customers entering the park have paid their daily fee, and of course this is passed on to the park authority.

Unfortunately there are many companies on the island that don't care as we do. They not only tell people that they can use a bracelet multiple times but often don't ensure that bracelets are paid for and worn.

We can't run after every client to make sure they remove bracelets at the end of a day and put on a new one. No date is printed on them. However, we

do make clear that clients must pay the fee for every day of park use, and every day a new bracelet is available for them at the dive centre.

Divers can't board the boat without a bracelet, and it can't be attached to a BC that might be switched between users. We can't guarantee that guests never keep their old bracelets on, but we can honestly say that this will be a very rare case.

Dive in a day? That's OK!

In a recent *Off-Gassing* comment a writer appeared to scoff at someone who said that he learned to dive in a day. Well, I too learned to dive in a day.

While on a holiday in the Seychelles I took the opportunity of a free offer to do a try-dive. This started in the hotel pool, where breathing, buoyancy and safety were taught.

After a couple of hours the instructors chose those he thought were capable of a sea dive. So off I went and dived to 9m in the gentle bay just off the hotel beach.

This led to a great sense of achievement and a 20-minute, tightly controlled dive. We didn't see much, but the buzz of being under water and breathing was intense. I was scuba-diving.

It is obviously true that I was not a fully competent diver, but I was diving nevertheless and had learned some of the basics in a day.

Try-dives are a great way to enthuse those toying with the idea of scuba-diving, and telling prospective divers that a one-day event doesn't teach you how to dive is off-putting.

I now have 165 dives under my belt and am still learning – so when do I become a scuba-diver?

Otherwise, keep up the good work!

STEVE COLLIER, COLERNE, WILTS

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Malta drops bid to extradite Briton on 'weak' death charge

A REQUEST BY A MALTESE court for the extradition of a British diver to face a charge of involuntary homicide over a fatal incident while diving off the Maltese island of Gozo in June 2014 was sensationally withdrawn in late January.

Stephen Martin, 55, from Rustington, West Sussex, was served with the European arrest warrant/extradition request in early July last year. For more than six months he had to live with a tag, report to a police station three times a day and observe a night-time curfew.

The withdrawal of the order came two days before an appeal against it was due to be heard at London's High Court, success of which would have meant that the extradition request would not have been granted.

A campaign to support Martin had built up a head of steam and, by late 2015, involved divers in the UK and Malta, legal and political backers in the UK and financial support pledged by the British Sub-Aqua Club to meet legal costs.

All were convinced that a tragic accident befalling Martin and his dive group had prompted a ridiculously excessive reaction by the Gozo magistrate, whose charge sheet revealed the flimsiest of evidence for involuntary homicide and even an ignorance of what might realistically be expected of divers operating under water.

The charge related to the deaths of Larissa Hooley, 48, Martin's partner, and Nigel Haines, 59, who died during a rescue attempt on Hooley. The charge and extradition request came after an inquest by Brighton and Hove Coroner's Court in February 2015 had returned a verdict of accidental death for the pair.

The group of five divers from BSAC's Brighton branch – the others were Jeremy Coster and Alan Cranston – had commenced a shore dive off Gozo, with Hooley and Martin buddied and at the front of the group as they finned along close to the shoreline at a depth of 10-12m.

The others were following when, without warning, Hooley made a sharp turn seaward and began to



Stephen Martin: 'Should never have been accused in the first place.'

'MY SOLICITOR...WANTED TO GIVE THEM A BLOODY NOSE BECAUSE THE CASE WAS SO WEAK'

descend sharply. Martin was practically shoulder-to-shoulder with Hooley, but said her turn occurred outside his peripheral vision so he did not immediately note it.

The others did so, and Haines and Coster followed Hooley, whose exhalation bubbles indicated that she was breathing rapidly.

They got to her at 35m and, with Hooley blank-eyed and unresponsive, conducted a controlled buoyant lift to the surface. With Martin and Cranston now also surfaced, Hooley was towed ashore in a sea state lumpy enough to cause some difficulty in getting her on to and up a fairly steep rocky slope, but this was achieved with the help of people ashore.

A German doctor happened to be among them and conducted CPR on Hooley until the emergency services arrived and confirmed that she had died.

Haines had seemingly been fine as he helped bring Hooley to shore but, as she was removed from the sea, Martin, Coster and Cranston realised that he was no longer with them and, his BC inflated, had drifted out to sea.

Cranston ran about 100m to where a RIB was moored and was able to get its owner to run out to pick up Haines, who was brought ashore unconscious

and found also to have died.

Equipment used by Martin, Hooley, Haines and Coster was impounded. Much of it was owned by Maltaqua, from which the divers had hired gear, but computers and Coster's BC were personal yet never returned.

At the British inquest it was heard that both Hooley and Haines had suffered pulmonary oedemas. Hooley would have suffered hers spontaneously, an expert medical witness told the inquest, and as her oxygen intake reduced, this would have explained her rapid breathing and erratic behaviour. Haines was likely to have suffered his during the stress of the rescue attempt.

shore-dive site had prevented entry.

On arrival there, they had found other divers going out in conditions that seemed fair enough for diving.

Other allegations included that Martin should have given first aid to Hooley "whilst she was still under water", which he rejected as impracticable; that Hooley's and Haines' dive profiles included "unorthodox" fast descent and ascent rates, which Martin maintained was to be expected given Hooley's problem and Haines' rescue attempt; and that Martin had failed to check for gear faults, which he rejected as impracticable in that the group carried out standard buddy-checks before the dive and could not be expected to have made other checks thereafter.

In the UK, Martin's backers included his local MP, Sir Peter Bottomley, who agreed that the charge against him represented a grave over-reaction to a tragic diving accident, and met the Maltese High Commissioner with Martin's solicitor to request a re-evaluation of the case.

A FACEBOOK CAMPAIGN run by Jen Kearney and Barry Goss garnered appreciable support. "I understand that there were over 3000 emails from concerned divers," Martin told **DIVER**.

BSAC weighed in with its own backing after coming under immense pressure from members concerned about a gap in the cover afforded them by the club's third-party liability insurance policy.

This was duly altered in late August last year to include manslaughter, corporate manslaughter and culpable homicide, and the club announced its willingness to back Martin with up to £100,000 for legal representation.

In Malta, experienced diving practitioners developed sympathy for Martin's position. The island's Professional Diving Schools Association ended up joining BSAC in lobbying Malta's Attorney General in support of Martin.

The decision to withdraw the extradition request is thought to have involved a combination of rising doubt about the strength of the case against Martin, the scale of lobbying against it and worry about its effects



Martin's discarded tracking tag.



Larissa Hooley and Stephen Martin in Budapest in 2013.

on diving tourism. There was the prospect of a near-collapse of British diving visitors to Malta if Martin's extradition went ahead. A number were already choosing to stay away.

Certainly Martin was convinced that the appeal hearing would have gone his way. "What a climb down," he told **DIVER**. "My solicitor was annoyed that the Maltese threw the towel in; he was sure the judge would not allow me to be extradited, and he wanted to give them a bloody nose because their case was so weak."

The solicitor, Edward Elwyn Jones of Hodge Jones & Allen Solicitors, told press that Martin "should never have been accused in the first place".

He described the involuntary homicide charge as "bizarre", as it was not at all clear how it would be proved that Martin had caused the deaths of Hooley and Haines.

"It is rare for an extradition request to be withdrawn," he said. "Often when they are it is as a result of lobbying outside the courtroom, and BSAC are to be commended for the work they have done to highlight Stephen's plight at the highest level."

MARTIN'S BARRISTER, extradition specialist Ben Cooper of Doughty Street Chambers, was to argue that the extradition warrant was an abuse of process as parts of it could be shown to be inaccurate; and that as British law carries no charge equivalent to involuntary homicide, Martin should not be extradited to face such a charge in Malta. Prison conditions in that country would also have breached his human rights.

As it was, Cooper was called to an unscheduled hearing two days before the appeal hearing set for 20 January, and emerged "delighted" to convey the news that the extradition request

had been withdrawn.

"I was absolutely elated, but it is a bittersweet success really because at the end of it two of my very, very good friends died," said Martin. "I am overwhelmed. This has been an utter nightmare for me, and I am just so relieved it is over. I feel I can finally start grieving for Larissa and Nigel."

BSAC Chief Executive Mary Tetley told press: "This was a tragic accident... It is a victory for common sense that these charges have now been dropped, allowing Stephen to move on with his life, and grieve in peace."

"We have asked the Maltese authorities for further clarification on their guidance for divers, and in the meantime we are advising divers to check the local regulations before they dive in any foreign country."

Martin told **DIVER**: "I will return to Malta in the summer for a memorial dive in honour of Larissa and Nigel, and to place a plaque under water if I'm allowed to."

"I'd like to meet Larry Formosa, who was my solicitor in Malta, and to help the Maltese repair the damage the affair has caused the diving industry."

He added that, despite all he had been put through, Malta remained his "favourite place to dive". He has close links with the island, having been born on a Royal Navy base at Mtarfa and spending his early childhood on the island "while my father was stationed in Malta in the '60s".

An investigation is under way in Malta to establish any extent to which incompetence may have featured in the formulation of the involuntary homicide charge and extradition request.

Martin plans to stand for BSAC Chairman at the club's next round of voting for the position, to "hopefully give something back". ■

THE BIG QUESTION

Can't wait to see...

"Which creature is top of your marine-life sighting wishlist?" we asked you last month, and it brought a big response. It isn't always a question of a first sighting – you may have seen it before and can't wait to repeat the experience.

Mantas and whale sharks were almost neck and neck in your affections. And our thanks to the reader eager to see a blobfish (ready for a 600m dive?) Any excuse for a picture!



YOUR TOP 20

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Manta ray | 11 Humpback whale |
| 2 Whale shark | 12 Octopus |
| 3 Hammerhead shark | 13 Blue whale |
| 4 Shark (any) | 14 Basking shark |
| 5 Dolphin | 15 Orca |
| 6 Whale | 16 Seal |
| 7 Mola mola (sunfish) | 17 Ray (any) |
| 8 Great white shark | 18 Nudibranch |
| 9 Turtle | 19 Leatherback turtle |
| 10 Seahorse | 20 Cuttlefish |

COMMENTS

"Dumbo octopus, mola mola and dugong share first position – all beautiful and rare." Dani Naydenova

"Moray eel – the most graceful creature of the reef." Karl Blume

"Would love to dive at Peninsula Valdez and be close to a Southern right whale." Alan O'Neill

"Giant squid would be awesome and slightly frightening to see!" Zoe

"Trip to the Maldives booked so I hope the giant manta can get ticked off. Next in line is a seahorse." Campbell Stewart

"An almost-impossibility is to see a blobfish in its natural habitat – it would be the crowning glory if I did manage to see one." James Sheward

"Would love to dive with leatherback turtles." Sandra Lane

"Basking sharks are incredible and in British waters." Dave Horton

"My buddy – she's usually somewhere in the distance." Chris Heywood

"Tiger shark – it was manta until a fabulous trip to the Maldives last March." John Gray

"Hammerhead sharks – I love seeing them from below." Geraint Owen

"Whale shark, it's such a big, graceful, friendly creature." John Williams

"I'd like to know I was pretty much safe but I'd prefer to dive without a cage to really see what great whites are like." Richard Boutcher

"Seahorses are really interesting and to be honest very cute. I haven't found one yet but the difficulty only adds to their appeal." Clair Read

"I've seen mantas on an organised feeding dive – so awe-inspiring but a bit forced. To see one in the open ocean would be fantastic." Liz Suggitt

"Crazy about nudis." Diane Gan

"Looking a manta in the eye is like no other experience on Earth." Marcus Knight

"Each time someone in my dive group has seen a shark I've been looking the other way!" Patsy Appleton

Go to www.divernet.com to answer the next Big Question and you could win a £118 Luxfer 3-litre compact emergency pony cylinder from Sea & Sea. More on Luxfer cylinders at www.dive-team.com. Latest winner is Tszyan Cheung from Swindon.



THE NEXT BIG QUESTION

What would you like to see recognised as Britain's "national fish"? (see page 20)

Tell us what it is and feel free to tell us why

Tally of MCZs increases – but more

A FURTHER 23 MARINE CONSERVATION ZONES are to be designated off English coasts, the Government has announced. The additions will mean that 50 English MCZs exist.

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) described the move as “a really positive step in achieving a genuine network of marine protection around the country’s coast”, while The Wildlife Trusts described it as a “renewed impetus to protect the seas around our shores”.

“Among the newly created MCZs are Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds, the longest chalk reef known in Europe; Farnes East, one of the deepest patches of the North Sea, reaching to between 30m and 100m in depth; Greater Haig Fras, the only substantial area of rocky reef in the Celtic Sea; and Mounts Bay, covering St Michael’s Mount and the Marazion area, home to important species such as seagrass, stalked jellyfish and crayfish,” said the MCS.

The organisation added that it was “pleased that the Government appears to be sticking to its commitment to develop a full network of sites” despite the total still being “some way off the original number proposed by the Government’s scientific advisors, sea-users and conservation groups five years ago”.

A third and final consultation and designation process for more MCZs will take place in 2017/18. Melissa Moore, MCS Head of Policy, said: “We’re recommending that the final tranche includes South Celtic Deep, a site that supports short-beaked common dolphin; Norris to Ryde, which is rich in seagrass meadows; Mud Hole off the north-west coast, 35m deep and home to rare sea pens; and Compass Rose off the Yorkshire coast, which is an important spawning and nursery ground for herring and lemon sole.”

Joan Edwards, head of Living Seas at The Wildlife Trusts, said: “This second step towards the completion

of a ‘blue belt’ in UK seas is crucial in turning the tide on the state of our seas but there’s still work to be done. We look forward to working with Government and stakeholders to ensure these 50 MCZs are properly managed and to achieve the much-needed ambitious and comprehensive third and final tranche.”

Richard White, Senior Marine Conservation Officer at Devon Wildlife Trust, welcomed the inclusion of Bideford to Foreland Point and Hartland Point to Tintagel, which meant that “for the first time the rich marine wildlife of the north Devon coast has legal protection from damaging activities”.

“There is still much more to do if the network of protection around our coast is to be completed,” he said.

“We await news on the future of six Devon estuaries proposed as MCZs and there is still the question of how areas important for whales, sharks and dolphins are to be protected.”

The last point was taken up by

Whale and Dolphin Conservation (WDC) which, while welcoming the Government’s announcement, criticised the lack of areas that would protect cetaceans.

“Thirty species of whales, dolphins and porpoises are known to occur in UK waters, 12 of which are resident seasonally or year-round in English waters, meaning that these waters are vital to them for breeding, feeding and other biologically important activities,” it said.

“Not including any cetacean species in any of the MCZs means that the representativeness of the MCZ network is questionable and the network cannot be ecologically coherent,” said Pine Eisfeld-Pierantonio, WDC Conservation and Policy Officer.

This was surprising given that The Marine & Coastal Access Act 2009 “requires Government to establish a network of MPAs that protects habitats and species which are representative of the range of habitats

CYPRUS TRAINING FOR DEEP-DIVING ARCHAEOLOGISTS

A TRAINING COURSE in wreck archaeology for technical divers is being run in Cyprus from 20 August to 3 September.

The Cyprus Underwater Archaeology Fieldschool 2016 is taking applications mainly from technical divers in Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean region, but there are six places for people from other areas and three divers attended from the UK last year.

The fieldschool will be held on the *Mazotos* wreck, which lies in 45m off Cape Kiti. It will be taught in English by staff from the UK’s Nautical Archaeology Society and the University of Cyprus.

“Participants will be able to contribute to genuine research on this important site, which is being studied by the University of Cyprus Maritime Archaeological Research Laboratory,” says the NAS.

Minimum diving qualifications required are TDI Deco Procedures, SSI Extended Range, or PADI Tec 45 or equivalent. Decompression diving will be undertaken using 100% oxygen. DAN Insurance is required.

The cost per head is £1750, to

include tuition, certification, all internal travel, accommodation, food, diving air, cylinder hire and excursions. The price does not include travel to Cyprus or any

additional equipment hire.

The deadline for applications is 26 February. For an application form, email: nas@nauticalarchaeology.society.org

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and species in our seas". As such "there is a major gap that needs to be filled" by the third and final tranche of MCZs.

WDC was cheered by the January launch of a public consultation regarding possible implementation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for harbour porpoises in English, Welsh and Northern Irish waters. However, the Scottish Parliament announced that it would not go ahead with the consultation in relation to four mooted Scottish sites.

Meanwhile a spanner was thrown into the MCZ works by Prof Callum Roberts, a marine conservation expert at the University of York.

"Despite the [50] MCZs, the UK's rich marine life has very little protection," he told the *Guardian*. "That may sound paradoxical, but six years after the Marine Act was passed, MCZs are still paper parks."

"They have no management at all, so life within them remains unprotected. They will be worse than useless, giving the illusion of

WHALE & DOLPHIN CONSERVATION



Bottlenose dolphin – one of the species requiring more protection, says WDC.

protection where none is present."

He remained "sceptical" of the Government's claim that an effective system of marine management would be in place within two years, and pointed out the contrast of its still-modest commitment to protection in UK waters compared with its recent moves internationally with large reserves at Chagos in the Indian Ocean, the Pitcairns in the Pacific and, most recently, Ascension Island in the Atlantic.

The new MCZs:

North Sea: 1 Coquet to St Mary's; 2 Farnes East; 3 Fulmar; 4 Runswick

Bay; 5 Holderness Inshore; 6 Cromer Shoal Chalk Beds. **South-east:** 7 Swale Estuary; 8 Dover to Deal; 9 Dover to Folkestone; 10 Offshore Brighton; 11 Offshore Overfalls; 12 Utopia; 13 The Needles.

South-west: 14 Western Channel; 15 Mounts Bay; 16 Lands End; 17 North-west of Jones Bank; 18 Greater Haig Fras; 19 Newquay & the Gannel; 20 Hartland Point to Tintagel; 21 Bideford to Foreland Point.

Irish Sea: 22 West of Walney; 23 Allonby Bay. ■

Measures taken to get Egyptian tourism back on track

HOLIDAY TRAVEL BETWEEN the UK and the Egyptian resort of Sharm el Sheikh remained largely in limbo as **DIVER** went to press in late January.

A number of British air-carriers had announced earliest possible dates for the resumption of flights, with easyJet committed to suspensions until at least 27 May, British Airways to 26 March, Thomas Cook and Thomson Airways to 23 March and Monarch to 14 February.

In reality, the carriers are being guided by the advice of the British Government, which suspended all flights to Sharm on 4 November last year following the destruction of a Russian airliner with the loss of 224 lives.

Islamic State jihadists claimed responsibility for the attack, which is believed to be the case by intelligence services, although the Egyptian Government continues to deny that a bomb aboard the aircraft was responsible.

All flights from the UK have remained suspended, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advising against all but essential travel to the

airport while the British Government and other parties work with the Egyptian authorities in a bid to resume flights "as soon as appropriate security arrangements are in place".

In mid-January Hisham Zaazou, the Egyptian Minister of Tourism, announced fresh security measures for key tourist resorts, involving an investment of 50 million Egyptian pounds (US \$32 million).

Included are the installation of additional CCTV systems in Sharm el Sheikh and Hurghada, to be integrated with the private filming systems in hotels, restaurants etc and controlled by an enhanced Command and Control centre.

The programme would be "rolled out across other resorts in due course", said the Egyptian State Tourist Office in London.

Also part of the programme are updated scanning and detection equipment, the placement of additional security personnel in key areas both on land and to monitor any potential threat coming off the sea, and the addition of "significant numbers" of sniffer dogs. ■

Peru protects manta rays

PERU, WHICH HAS THE WORLD'S largest-known population of giant oceanic manta rays, is to protect mantas from fishing.

In January the Peru Government passed a resolution prohibiting deliberate takes of manta rays and specifying that accidental bycatch should be released back into the sea immediately.

Gill-plates from giant mantas are sold in some Asian markets for alleged health properties.

This move comes after years of advocacy by WildAid, Planeta Océano and the Manta Trust. The groups worked with coastal communities to establish how mantas were affected by fishing activity, and to explore an expansion of manta-ray tourism as an alternative source of income.

Peru joins a dozen countries with manta protection laws, including its neighbour, Ecuador. The Peruvian protection makes especially good sense in regional terms, because mantas migrate between Peru and Ecuador. ■

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Another tragedy for Sundiver

A N AMERICAN DIVER was lost and presumed dead after being left behind at a dive-site by a diving charter boat at the end of December last year.

Laurel Silver-Valker, 45, from Tustin, California, was diving at Santa Catalina in the Ship Rock area with other tourists when her dive boat, the *Sundiver Express*, operated by Sundiver International of Long Beach, departed from the area without her aboard.

It was reported that, when crew realised that Silver-Valker was not aboard, the boat returned to search for her without success and an emergency call was put out. Further searches failed to locate the diver.

She made one dive at about 9.30am and was back aboard to post a Facebook message just after 10, it was reported. The boat departed for a second dive-site not long afterwards, said police.

Silver-Valker was a regular on trips run by *Sundiver Express* and was well-known by the crew. Having suffered a back injury and developed

fibromyalgia with associated chronic pain, her modest means were disability payments and income from part-time teaching.

She would volunteer to work in some capacity aboard dive-boats to be able to dive inexpensively. It is not clear from press coverage in what capacity she was aboard *Sundiver Express* on the day that she was lost.

As **DIVER** went to press in late January, a request to Sundiver International for any statement it could provide about events, and whether or not the company faced any potential legal action, remained unanswered.

The company was raising money through its Facebook page to help pay for a "celebration of life" memorial for Silver-Valker. The fund stood at just over \$9500.

An investigation into how she had disappeared was being conducted by the US Coast Guard.

One diver, commenting on a forum at www.divebuddy.com, said: "The missing diver... was a really good

friend of mine and I've logged at least 20 dives with her as my buddy over the last seven years." He described her as "a very good diver".

He, too, had dived off the *Sundiver Express* many times and described the boat's skipper as "very professional" and the crew as "proficient" and "diligent". He suspected that Silver-Valker "was not diving with a buddy this tragic day, as I have seen her dive many, many times without one" and that having a buddy would have increased the chance of her being noticed as missing.

He also wondered whether Silver-Valker had been "on the dive roster or just tagging along on the boat and decided to jump in".

The operator would certainly be expected to have put good systems in place after the pain of being fined \$1.68 million jointly with Ocean Adventures Dive Co of Venice, California after Daniel Carlock, from Santa Monica, was left behind on a dive off Newport Beach in 2004.

Then 45, Carlock had to wait until

2010 for the judgment after a protracted legal contest. His eventually successful argument was that he had suffered post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of the drift, during which "I had this feeling my spirit was getting ready to vacate my body", and had developed facial skin cancer from sunburn suffered as he lay face-up at the surface.

He was rescued seven miles off Newport Beach when a tall ship, the *Argus*, happened to spot him after altering course to avoid another vessel.

Initially his award was set at \$2 million but the jury at Los Angeles County Superior Court reduced this to \$1.68 million as Carlock was deemed partly responsible, having been asked to surface nearer the boat.

He had surfaced, he estimated, about 120m away, had got cramp in his legs when he tried to swim towards the boat and had not been able to gain the crew's attention either by blowing his whistle or by waving his surface marker buoy. ■

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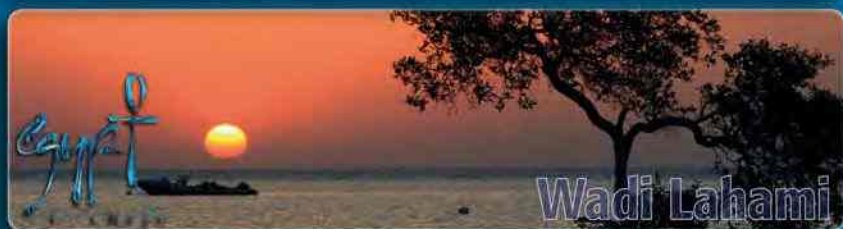
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German WW1 sub identified

DETAILS HAVE EMERGED

of the positive identification of the WW1 German submarine *U31* in the North Sea.

The wreckage was found by accident in September 2012 during a geophysical survey being conducted by energy companies ScottishPower Renewables and Vattenfall, in connection with a planned windfarm development.

Lying 30m down and some 55 miles off Caister-on-Sea in Norfolk, the wreck was visited by Dutch naval divers in case it was that of HNLMS *O13*, the Dutch navy's last missing WW2 sub.

They found the wreck in good condition for its age, with the conning tower still evident and a fair portion of the hull exposed above the seabed. Damage at the bow suggested that it might have hit a mine.

Video footage taken by the team of the conning-tower and deck layout strongly suggested a WW1 German

submarine. Subsequent comparison with design plans confirmed that it had to be a Type U31 of WW1 and that it would be the wreck of either *U31* or *U34*, both lost in the area.

Even though they knew that the wreck was not that of a Dutch vessel, the Dutch navy carried out a number of further dives to examine it further, but a positive identity eluded them.

Certainty about its identity came with a dive on the wreck last year by the Netherlands's Lamslash North Sea Diving, which enjoyed finer conditions and was able to confirm the submarine as *U31* through design unique to the vessel.

The 58m *U31* was sunk in 1915 with the loss of all its 35 crew.

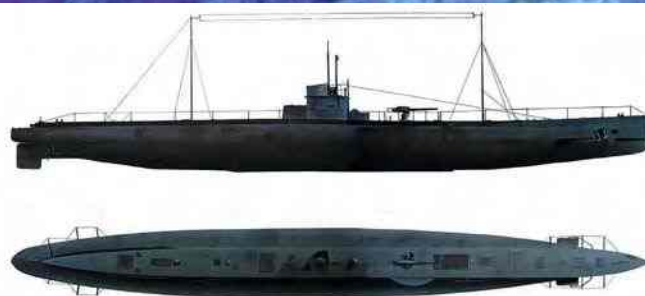
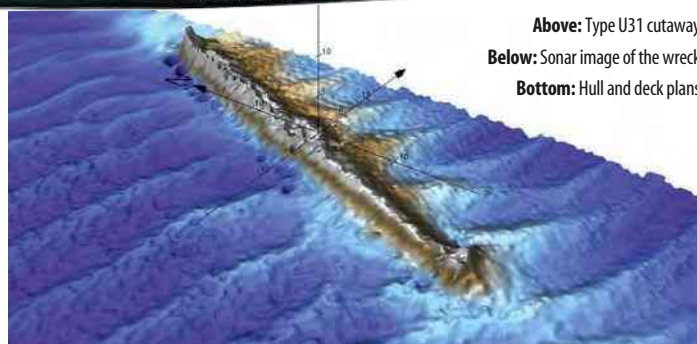
It is an official military war grave and is to be left alone if a windfarm is established in the area. ■



Above: Type U31 cutaway.

Below: Sonar image of the wreck.

Bottom: Hull and deck plans.



CUTAWAY & PLANS: WWW.MILITARYHISTORY.X10.MX SAKHAL 2012-2016

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PCBs still a threat to marine life

POLYCHLORINATED biphenyls (PCBs), used in construction and paints including marine anti-fouling up to the mid-1980s, are still present in the tissues of sea creatures and remain a toxin affecting their immune systems and the ability to reproduce.

A study involving scientists in the UK, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and Slovenia has reported that fatty tissue of killer whales and bottlenose and striped dolphins in Europe had among the highest concentrations of PCBs found anywhere in the world.

A fourth species that featured in the research, the harbour porpoise, held lower levels of the chemicals.

Samples were taken from animals off Britain, Ireland, the Strait of Gibraltar and the Canary Islands.

PCBs settled on the seabed and worked their way up the food chain after being absorbed by creatures such as mussels, crabs and smaller, bottom-picking fish.

Particular concern was expressed for the killer whale. Paul Jepson, of the Zoological Society of London, told press: "It's really looking bleak... We think there is a very high extinction risk for killer whales as a species in industrialised regions of Europe."

The study's findings are published in the journal *Scientific Reports*. ■



Killer whales are one of the species most at risk from ingestion of plastics.

PLASTICS ARE EVERYWHERE NOW

THE EXTENT TO WHICH plastics are infiltrating the world's oceans, from large pieces to miniscule broken-down remnants, has been well-known for some time. But now it has been established that even zooplankton, at the base of the marine foodchain, are eating them.

Scientists at the Plymouth Marine Laboratory in Devon have managed to film, at microscopic level, copepods eating and accumulating fluorescent polystyrene beads measuring only 7-30 micrometres across.

The creatures seemingly mistake

the plastics for their normal diet of algae. They then stay in their bodies for up to a week unless they manage to feed further on real, algal food.

If eaten by a higher predator, toxic chemicals stored in the plastics then move on up through the food chain. ■

COUSTEAU'S CALYPSO SET TO SAIL AGAIN

JACQUES COUSTEAU'S famous vessel *Calypso* is to be restored to seagoing condition after the eventual resolution of financial disputes that have seen the ship gradually rot away over many years in France.

In 1996 – a year before Cousteau's death – the *Calypso* sank in Singapore harbour after being hit accidentally by a manoeuvring barge.

She was refloated and towed to Marseilles where she lay for two years

before being transferred to La Rochelle. There she has continued to lie derelict as disagreements continued between members of the Cousteau family and the ship's owner, Loel Guinness.

Guinness sold the vessel to the Cousteau Society for one euro in 2007 and the ship was transferred to the Piriou shipyard in Concarneau, where restoration work began before being halted after two years because of

disputes over payments.

The stored ship continued to deteriorate, and in 2013 the Cousteau Society launched a petition to raise restoration funds. In March last year a court ordered the Society to meet yard bills amounting to about 273,000 euros.

In mid-January the Society was able to announce that bills had been settled and the ship's restoration was once more on track, after 300,000 euros had been raised through the Society's public fundraising initiative.

A number of international sponsors are in the frame to help return the ship to its former glory.

The ship, originally a Royal Navy minesweeper built in 1941, requires a complete overhaul with extensive refurbishment of its hull and interior, and the complete refitting of engines (two Volvos) and equipment.

The hope for the restored vessel is that it will become "a living representative of ecology sailing the oceans of the world" once more. ■



Calypso in 1980.

Marine-life lab for St Andrews

A £10 MILLION MARINE laboratory is to be built at Scotland's University of St Andrews.

Situated at East Sands to replace the successful but ageing Gatty Marine unit, the 2256sq m centre is expected to push St Andrews to the forefront of research on marine life and the oceans globally.

The Scottish Oceans Institute, including the Sea Mammal Research Unit, which periodically carries out diving-related projects, will be based there.

A "smart" aquarium, allowing extensive control of temperature, lighting, pH, oxygen, salinity, ammonia and nitrates, will meet the needs of the most up-to-date research techniques, says the university. ■

NEW TAKE ON FUN-DIVING

IFDI, OR INTERNATIONAL FUN DIVING INSTRUCTORS, may number only 22 instructors in 17 countries to date, but it offers "a totally new approach to the industry of fun diving", claims founder Olivier Dauxais.

The Frenchman has developed a "100% digital" organisation that he says any instructor can use regardless of training-agency background, taking advantage of its low overheads to reduce both the certifying costs for them and the price of theory-learning for student divers.

IFDI does not train instructors, only insists that their qualification meets relevant ISO standards.

Dauxais, 45, has been a diver since 1983 and a professional instructor

since 1990, working mainly in the Maldives. He bought the domain IFDI.info in 2009 and created what he says is a secure website to store diving certifications.

Students are offered free online learning for the theoretical part of 10m, 20m, Nitrox, 30m and 40m Diver courses, with IFDI-registered instructors completing the training with the in-water sessions. Instructors pay IFDI US \$3 per certification registration.

"IFDI contributes to decrease the learning cost of fun-diving for the benefit of all of us," says Dauxais. He believes that limiting an instructor's qualification to the training agency that provided it "allows each diving 'brand' to keep its instructors chained to it and to keep manipulating them to promote exclusively their brand".

Continuing rivalry between agencies he regards as particularly unfortunate, "when we know that scuba-diving is one of the very rare sports that is not based on competition but on our common love for the underwater world".
www.IFDI.info



Olivier Dauxais, founder of IFDI.

Help to name the national fish

Tompot blenny, one of the contenders for Britain's national fish.



A NATIONAL BALLOT is being run to determine which, in the public's mind, is the most British of fish – and divers are in a great position to contribute.

From pre-selected lists of 20 seawater and 20 freshwater species, participants are invited to vote for their favourite in each group.

The UK National Fish Vote is being run by an underwater photographer, Jack Perks (left), with the help of angling and fisheries experts. He has written for DIVER about freshwater diving.

First-round voting runs up to 27 February, after which a shortlist is selected for further voting up to a date, yet to be confirmed, in May, www.btwl.fishproject.com/#!uk-national-fish/gus4w



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Breathing difficulty was likely cause of death

A DIVER LOST HER LIFE after becoming unresponsive at depth, an inquest has heard.

Gloucestershire Coroners Court heard how Mary Restell, 54, was diving at the National Diving & Activity Centre at Tidenham with her husband Roy when she lost consciousness at a depth of 60m.

An emergency ascent was carried out but, despite subsequent attempts at resuscitation, Mary Restell died at the scene. Roy Westell suffered symptoms of decompression illness but recovered after recompression treatment.

Expert witness Thomas Anthony told the inquest that the trimix gas used by the pair had a relatively high

nitrogen content that might have had a narcotic influence, and that the gas would have felt heavy to breathe.

Breathing difficulty would have been compounded by the fact that Mrs Restell's regulators were found to be under-performing. Further, higher effort put into breathing would have increased the build-up of carbon dioxide in her blood.

The Restells, from Peter Tavy near Tavistock, were described as highly experienced divers who had completed more than 1350 dives over at least a decade, though on conventional air. The trimix dive was Mary Restell's first, said Anthony.

Roy Westell told the inquest that his wife first appeared confused,

making uncharacteristic movements. She "began to sink" such that he had to manage "her buoyancy as well as my own". There was "no understanding in her eyes" but, after a "rush of air from her mouthpiece" she was able to signal "that she could not breathe", at which point he made the emergency ascent.

A post mortem established that death had been caused by gas embolism and lung-related pulmonary barotrauma and pulmonary tumour.

The coroner, Katy Skerrett, described the case as "a tragic accident" and recorded a verdict of accidental death.

The Restells were regular volunteers with the marine biological research group Seasearch. ■

Boat runs down freedivers

A FREEDIVER WAS KILLED and his stepson seriously injured when they were run over by a motorised vessel off Lanikai, Hawaii in mid-January.

The men, 59 and 25, were freediving from a kayak anchored about 600m from the shore. According to press reports they had a surface buoy and the helmsman of the passing boat saw both kayak and buoy and altered course – yet still managed to run over the men.

Local regulations stipulate that a marker – a red-and-white flag – should be used by divers and swimmers in waters frequented by vessels, and that they should not stray further than 30m from it.

In addition, since November 2014 boat-owners have had to complete a boating course that includes the divers-down flag regulations. ■



A MAST student under training.

DAVID JONES

Grant to aid wreck appreciation

THE MARITIME ARCHAEOLOGY Sea Trust (MAST) has received a grant of £20,600 from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the training of divers and researchers participating in its Remembrance Wrecks of WWI and WW2 Pilot Project in the North-east.

Under MAST's tutelage, trainees will develop survey and archival skills to employ in the research of a series of wrecks off North Tyneside, including warships, submarines and merchantmen.

As a result, 10 divers and 10 researchers from the community will be able to appreciate more keenly the wrecks and their related stories from WW1 and WW2.

Divers will do MAST's Basic Archaeological Diver (BAD) course, a PADI distinctive speciality that teaches the arts of underwater

survey and an appreciation of maritime archaeology.

They will work closely with non-divers trained in archival skills.

★ MAST's newly compiled list of all Royal Naval losses over more than four centuries is both a convenient resource for the historical researcher and a fascinating delve for the casual reader.

Spanning from 1512 to 1945, the Royal Navy Loss List Complete Database holds 4779 ships and includes name, type and tonnage and where, when and how a vessel was lost. The guide is downloadable as a PDF at www.thisismast.org/royal-navy-loss-list.html

The organisation is aware not to set itself up for a fall. "Of course it's not foolproof and we welcome notice of any omissions," Jessica Berry, MAST CEO, told DIVER. ■

ASCENSION TO GET RESERVE

THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT is to establish a large marine reserve around the Atlantic's Ascension Island.

All fishing is to be banned in nearly 53% of Ascension's waters, covering just over 234,000sq km – nearly the size of the UK. Protected will be such creatures as green turtles, various shark species and marlin.

Policing will be carried out by combined satellite technology and patrol boats. Illegal shark-fishers will

be among those watched out for.

A monitored amount of tuna fishing will be allowed in the rest of the island's seas.

The British Government has worked with Ascension Island's Government, Blue Marine Foundation and The Bacon Foundation, which has provided a £300,000 grant, to establish the reserve.

Formal designation is expected during 2017. ■

HAWKSBILL TURTLE'S LUCK CHANGES

A MALDIVES LIVEABOARD'S diving charterers and crew were thrilled to be able to save the day for a hawksbill turtle that was found badly wrapped

in netting during a dive at Fesdu Lagoon. The trussed creature was eased onto the stern platform of the Constellation Fleet vessel *Leo* and

willing volunteers carefully sliced away the offending mesh. Once released, the turtle flapped its way off into the depths.

★ A group of divers in the Maldives are carrying out a 48-hour dive in the islands to highlight natural threats facing them and to add to research of flora and fauna. Dive 48 is to take place at Maaya Thila from 26-28 February. www.dive48.com



The turtle is turned on to its back for the last of the netting to be removed.

REJECTED FOR A REASON?

Jackie Hildering and Natasha Dickinson were diving near the northern tip of Vancouver Island in Canada when Natasha spotted a teddy-bear half-submerged in the silt, and rescued it.

Finding it hard to believe that anyone would deliberately throw away a teddy-bear, even though it had no eyes and was an ugly little thing, the divers posted pictures on a website devoted to lost and

found teddies, and are hoping to reunite the sad bear with its owner, who they both visualise as a heartbroken little girl.

Good idea ladies! On my last dive I found three empty crisp-packets and an old beer can and I'm going to try to find out who lost them so that I can take them back round and see the tears of joy when litter and lout are brought together once again.

totally brilliant yet, but it could be.

Imagine being able to wave your hand in the air to locate the shotline. Or your buddy. Even the small hole you found outside the wreck heading in, but now can't find inside the wreck heading out.

Come on, more development required!

Dodgy data

A US dive-school says that one out of every 5555 registered divers in the USA will die in a car accident, but that only one dive out of every 211,864 ends in a similar tragedy, so diving is safer than driving and you should go to them for your training.

Really? And how can you compare those two numbers? Lies, damned lies and the statistics used by dive-schools to get new customers.

Why 30?

The *Independent* recently ran a *30 Things to Do Before You're 30* piece, advising readers to try scuba-diving, or at least snorkelling.

First, diving and snorkelling have very little in common except for the peeing in the wetsuit. Second, did the paper really think diving and snorkelling belonged on the same list as suicidal activities such as BASE-jumping?


And third, why before you're 30? Go BASE-jumping before you're 30 and are still daft enough, but scuba, that's for life.

Hair-brained

Remember the extreme ironing craze? Take an iron and board on a dive and have your picture taken while ironing?

What a complete waste of time! There was never any electricity, so the iron never warmed up and the creases stayed in your shreddies no matter how long you ironed for.

Denis Yushin has a better idea – extreme barbering. He'll cut your hair while skydiving or halfway up a mountain or under water.

Yes! Finally, something worthwhile to pass the time on deco. 

To be expected

Remember Jon Crouse and Chris Reynolds? They are respectively the Canadian gent who found a 120-year-old bottle of beer at the bottom of Halifax harbour and the brewing enthusiast who wanted to taste it (see *last month's DIVER*).

A visit to the lab suggested that the beer probably wouldn't be poisonous, despite there being some very interesting stuff in it when it was viewed under a microscope.

So Reynolds took his courage in both hands, adjusted the hang of his brave trousers and necked a decent mouthful.

His verdict? "It smelt and tasted like really, really old beer." Odd, that.

Ask TripAdvisor

Look at couples doing a try-dive and you'll often see that one's really into it and the other is just along for the ride. And sometimes one of them will be really nervous, even frightened, and in need of huge support and reassurance before he or she gets anywhere near the water.

So where does someone like that turn for help? TripAdvisor, obviously.

And what help do they get? What do you think they get? It's a travel and hotel review site! Ask for a decent dive-school, OK. Ask for help because you're terrified, maybe not.

Mind you, the response to the lady who said she was scared witless by the whole idea and was doing it only to keep her boyfriend happy, is

something the training agencies need to think about.

Don't worry, came the advice, most of your diving course will be spent reading books and watching videos and you'll spend hardly any time in the water – so no need to worry!

Modelling work

Underwater photographers have always been a bit, er, special, but Benjamin Van Wong must be a bit more special than most. He wanted some shark pictures that were different, and decided to put a model in a floaty dress, then tie her to the rocks inside a cave where sharks were expected to be active.

Admittedly the images are great, but I would have dearly loved to see the job advert for that one.

Too much motion

Action cameras are now so common that you're more likely to own a GoPro than a mask and flippers. I may be exaggerating, but not by much.

Everywhere you look you'll see little plastic housings with tiny cameras mounted atop torches, fastened to Goodman handles and (and I shudder as I type this) to their user's head.

Sometimes they're mounted in a hardhat, cave-diver style; sometimes to a mask. But always they produce footage you could only call awful if you were in a really good mood.

The problem is camera movement.

Up, down, sideways, back and forward, usually all at once. Forcing suspects to watch headcam footage is now more popular than water-boarding as an interrogation technique.

Which brings me to the scientist who thought it a good idea to strap cameras to the backs of Adelie penguins. They're cute, but they exist in a blur of high-speed action. This makes watching the footage so nauseating that whoever is responsible should be thrown into a darkened room and beaten senseless with a pair of wet Speedos.

You'll find the footage online if you want but I wouldn't recommend it.

Glove potential

Sometimes, just sometimes, people come up with potentially useful ideas. Take a pair of postgrad Japanese students who have invented a sonar glove they call the *IrukaTact*, which is a cross between the Japanese word for dolphin and the "tact" bit of tactile. Ignoring the fact that you're wearing a touchy dolphin, it's available now, sort of, and it works – sort of.

The glove has a built-in transponder with a mini-computer linked to small water-jets. Wave your hand over a solid object and the jets squirt against your fingers. You get a soft spray if you're far away and a harder jet if you're close.

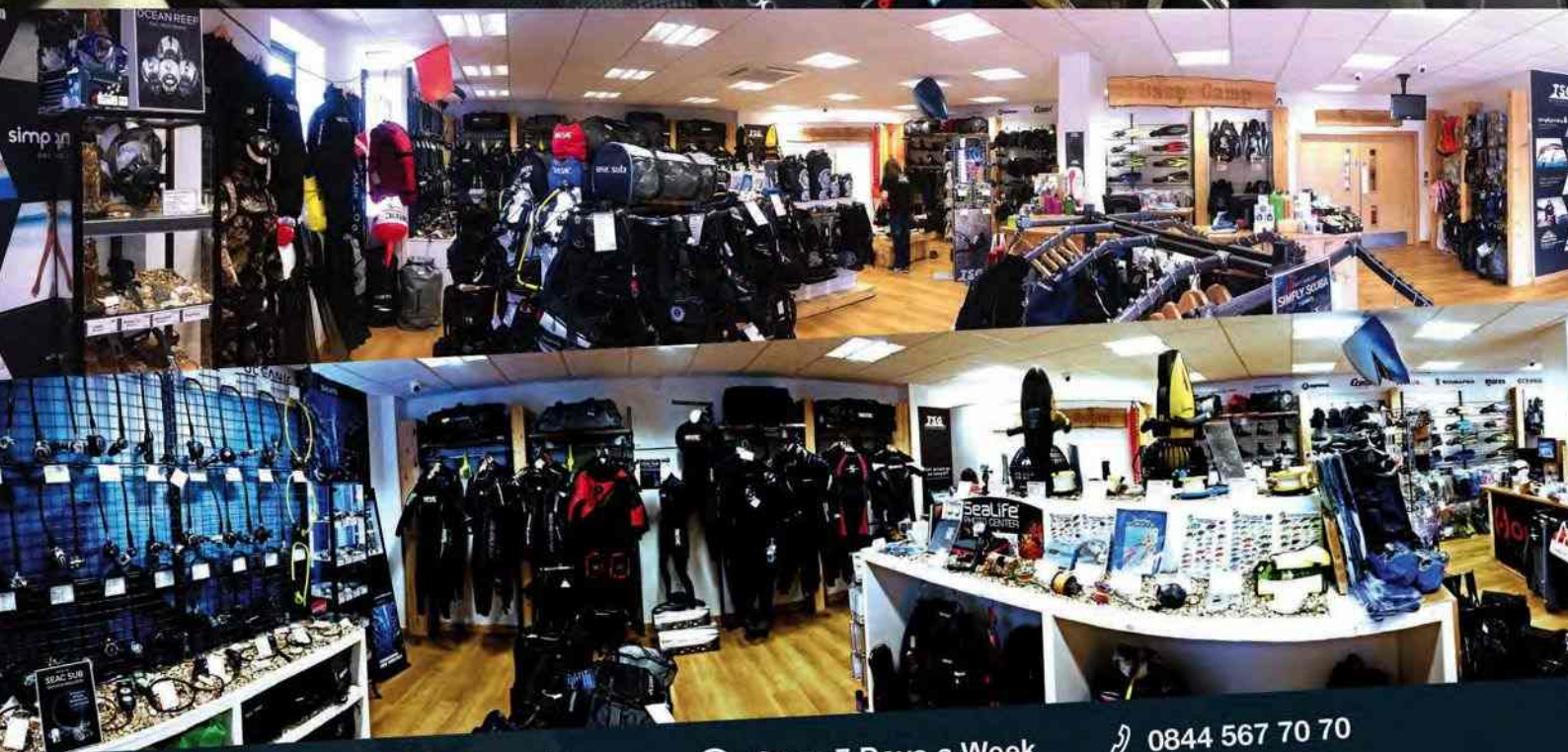
So far, so good, except it's only available as a DIY project and requires access to a 3D printer. Also, the definition of "far away" is currently just 2ft, which means it isn't

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THE SCALE OF JUSTICIA



Returning to dive what he reckons could be the best wreck-dive in the British Isles, **LEIGH BISHOP** fires up his new

scooter for a cruise down Memory Lane

Pictured: A classic monochrome time exposure of a diver scaling *Justicia*'s magnificent bow.

AT A DEPTH OF ALMOST 70m some 21 miles north-west of Malin Head off Northern Ireland lies what has to be one of wreck-diving's best-kept secrets. At 32,234 tons, the awesome *Justicia* is as big as the famed *Lusitania* and, as such, one of the largest sunken liners in the British Isles.

Visibility is as stupendous as I ever remember it being; equally stupendous is the vibe this wreck gives off. *Justicia* is both massive and perfect!

Quite possibly I'm even more excited

than I was the first day I dived her.

Justicia is almost 240m long, so is best explored using a DPV. Not many wrecks lend themselves to the use of a scooter in home waters but this grand old lady is one, if not *the* one!

I've returned armed with the latest in scooter technology, my new Suex XJoy, and jeez, have I got a smile on my face!

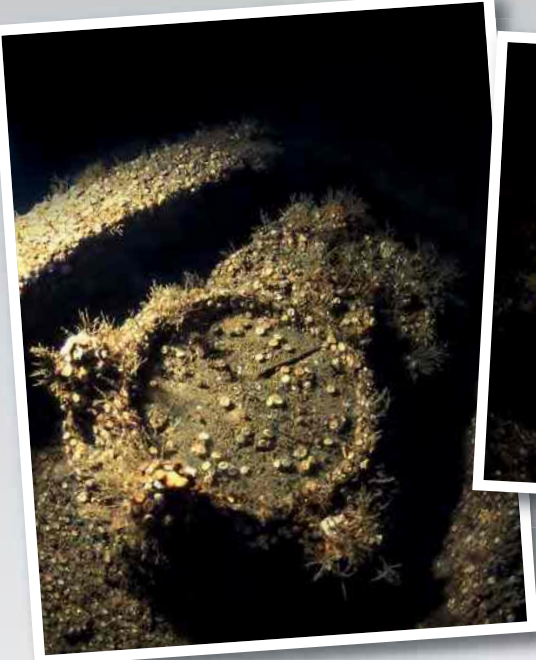
Making my way from that most impressive bow, I power across the foredeck, where chains, capstans, winchess and derricks make their

presence felt on a scale beyond that to which UK wreck-divers are accustomed.

Scootering across the bridge, I note that the wreck drops low and is somewhat collapsed to seabed level.

At this point it becomes quite broken, and I see that access can easily be gained, if required, to the spacious forecandle compartments below the bow foredecks.

I park the XJoy and proceed on foot, or should I say fin? Inside, all manner of massive machinery can be seen, machinery that once operated the



capstans and the big winches on the decks above. The chain and lamp locker-rooms can also be explored here.

As I light up the going ahead, I discover toilets and a small workshop that was perhaps once used to maintain the heavy working machinery surrounding me.

I fire up my scooter again and make headway towards the stern. Dropping the speed a little, I glide across the decks in the brilliant rays of sunlight that penetrate the crystal water.

By easing up the speed of the prop on the fly I'm able to enjoy the sightseeing, and I note the considerable number of windows and scuttles.

NOWHERE BEFORE HAVE I SEEN such a collection of differently designed windows on a single wreck, and big ones at that. There are classic circular portholes, oval windows with a pivot opening mechanism and several letterbox ventilation-type openings, designed specifically for ships that would operate in hot climates.

With a lithium battery powering the scooter on this return dive I'm able to circumnavigate the wreck several times and explore it all. The advanced technology has made this return visit a special dive, one that I'll remember as vividly as I remember the first, almost 15 years earlier.

For many years rumours had floated through the then-small technical diving community about this fine dive-site. Friends in the North-west would make their annual visit and tease us "Channel wreckers" in the South about their "jewel in the crown".

With more virgin wrecks in the Channel than we could cope with, the years seemed to fly by, but each one brought more intriguing whispers from the North concerning the fine wreck on which we were supposedly missing out.

Each year I would stop by to say hi to *Salutay* charter skipper Alan Wright on

Above left: This tropical porthole was the first of its kind that Leigh Bishop had seen constructed from iron.

Above right: One of the classic oval-shaped windows.

his stand at the Birmingham Dive Show. Each time Alan would repeat in his strong Irish accent: "You boys should get yourselves up to Northern Ireland and dive some proper wrecks!"

Alan was an authority on the wrecks off Malin Head and had often regaled me with stories of amazing rides on his old Aquazepp scooter across the *Justicia*.

Quite why I didn't respond to all those early calls I don't know, other than that Channel wrecks and international projects took up all my time and money.

Another man reluctant to let facts spoil a good rumour was Richard Stevenson. He too had heard rumours of Northern Ireland's fabulous wrecks, so he was delighted when an independent group chartered his company's dive-boat to visit the area.

He took time out to drop on the wreck of *Justicia* himself and was soon on the phone: "You boys should get yourselves up to Northern Ireland!"

I could wait no longer. Richard assured me that his boat would operate in north Irish waters the following season – my trip to *Justicia* was booked.

2001 turned out to be a vintage year in terms of exploration, with successful deep projects such as the gold ship *Egypt*, *Flying Enterprise* and many more. Looking back

now, my adventure to Ireland that same year was the icing on the cake.

I had booked a week's diving, and was content to relax and follow the "tourist dives" on offer. There were no ferry bookings to consider; the trip across the North Channel was all part of the service on offer from Richard's Deep Blue Diving. All we had to do was drive to Girvan on Scotland's west coast, load our gear on *Loyal Watcher* and enjoy the ride.

Loyal Watcher, an ex-Naval fleet tender, used Lough Swilly on the north Irish coast as a base for easy access to the nearby wrecks. Used as a natural harbour by the Allies during both world wars, it was an ideal place to shelter from the more than occasional local storms.

ONCE OUT OF THE ENTRANCE a journey out to *Justicia* is at the mercy of the weather. The exposed coastline can be battered hard by treacherous Rockall storms, not to mention some big Atlantic swells that follow them up.

On that first dive in brilliant visibility, I discovered the wreck resting on its port side, something that only really becomes apparent once you have circumnavigated the majority of the wreck.

From the bridge foredeck and aft the skeleton structure lies reasonably broken, but in the exceptional visibility the clean white sand and rock seabed reflect the sunlight even 70m down, and a torch is seldom required.

A service tunnel runs centrally the length of the wreck, a passage once used by the engine-room workers. It makes for an excellent navigation reference, with some sections large enough to penetrate even with a scooter.

Back in the day and using a film camera I shot flash-assisted colour images that did little justice to the scale of the wreck. Fluctuating over a shutter

Right: Foredeck undercarriage machinery can be seen inside the bow and directly below the foredeck. A huge section of anchor-chain can be seen to the left, feeding down from the exposed deck above.





speed of 1/60th of a second on an aperture of around f5.6, the images were dark and the strobes struggled to light up the wreck. I needed another plan!

Built alongside *Titanic*'s sister-ship *Britannic* and launched in July 1914, the then *Statendam* entered the war straight away. She was requisitioned by the government and put into managed service by the Cunard Line.

Because of outrage over the Germans' sinking of the *Lusitania* she was renamed *Justicia* (Latin for justice). Cunard struggled to assemble a crew for so big a ship, so *Justicia* was reassigned to the White Star Line. It had a crew available – from the recently sunken *Britannic*.

Working as a troopship with a dazzle camouflage scheme, *Justicia* made successful ocean voyages through most of the Great War. On 19 July, 1918, her luck ran out when she was torpedoed by the German type-III coastal U-boat *UB64*, commanded by Otto Von Schrader.

The watertight doors were successfully

closed in time, and *Justicia* remained afloat even after *UB64* fired a further three torpedoes into her!

Attacked and damaged by *Justicia*'s escorting vessels *UB64* fled, leaving *UB124* to finish her off the following day with a further two torpedoes.

By noon of 20 July, having now been struck by six torpedoes, the massive ship rolled over on her starboard side and eventually sank. Sixteen crewmen died.

UB124's crew also paid a price. Hunted down by the escorting vessels HMS *Marne*, *Millbrook* and *Pigeon*, the U-boat was attacked with depth-charges, forced to surface and sank immediately under serious gunfire.

I returned to Ireland in 2002 with a simple new photographic plan. I set up a newly built tripod and attached housing system on the seabed and banged off "big time" exposure shots, something no-one had tried before, at least not at this depth.

I chose to shoot fast black & white film, which I felt would give a far better

Above: Leigh Bishop using his new scooter to explore.

idea of how *Justicia* presents itself.

The visibility that year was easily on a par with that of Truk Lagoon, if not better – everything was in place.

IT WAS ANOTHER OF THOSE classic dives you never forget. We descended an anchorline secured to the seabed close to the bow, and were soon able to make out the wreck.

The sun high in the sky, from almost 50m above we could see how the bow sat twisted in relation to the bridge, and how its broken sections had collapsed to the port side of the huge service tunnel.

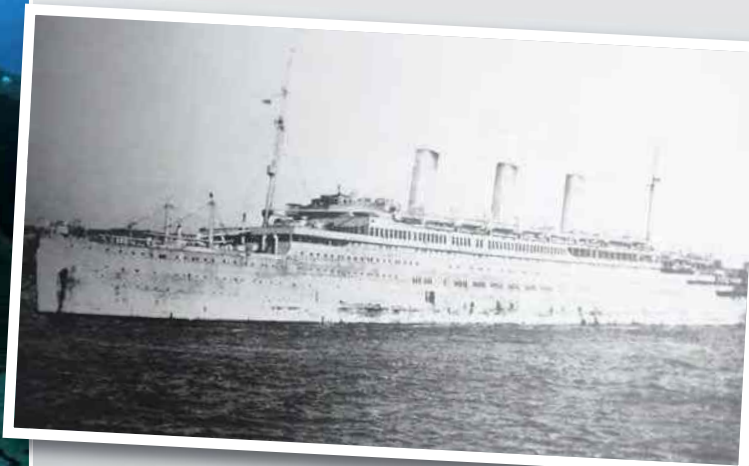
We went on to explore the wreck at an average depth of 68-70m, and discovered a huge section of what looks like and can easily be mistaken for starboard hull, but is in fact bridge castle – a demonstration of the sheer size of this wreck.

But the real treat came when we swam around the bow, which lies broken off, a little aft of the forecastle, in one complete intact section. We passed a huge housed anchor in the starboard side of the bow, dwarfing us.

Then, moving a short distance from the wreck before turning back, we saw one of the most awesome sights we

Below left: Looking from the port side across the lower section of what would have been *Justicia*'s bridge.

Below: *Justicia* in 1914, shortly after completion.



Pictured: View from the starboard seabed level looking towards the bow end of the wreck over three of the boilers.

will ever see on a wreck. The bow, presented with a list to port, was remarkable – almost fully intact, rising tall from the seabed and with the remaining safety-rail running around the very tip of the deck to give the wreck that *Titanic* feel.

I just had to set up my tripod camera system on the seabed to capture some seriously long exposure images at this point. Back in that pre-digital era I was one of the few underwater film photographers and certainly the only one shooting deep wrecks. My choice of film was Agfa Scala, a black & white transparency E6 film that I was able to push to 1600 speed to get the best effects from the light available at depth.

By experimenting with exposure values I was able to capture images that would tell the story of *Justicia* in the way the wreck wanted me to tell it.

Now, on my recent return to the wreck, as I scoot towards the stern *Justicia*


doesn't look that different.

Navigating openly among not one, not two but at least 12 gigantic and exposed double-ended Scotch boilers lying in rows of three, I can see that they are separated by collapsed bulkheads, and this makes my progress through the wreck easier.

Although twisted in sections, most of the wreck rests directly on its port side, as does the stern. Unlike the bow, the stern has no unusual buckling within its structure, so the portside propeller lies under the wreck as would be expected.

The centre prop, however, appears buried, its blade-tips protruding, while the starboard prop rises proud and clear of the seabed.

The scooter's handy electronic fuel gauge indicates that the tank is still full, so it's time to notch up a little speed and take another cruise or two around this fabulous wreck, still with that big smile!

Get yourself up to Northern Ireland – you don't know what you're missing. 

Right: Few serious artefacts lie around the site of *Justicia*, although this main bridge telemotor was recovered in 2001.

Below left: A diver lends scale to *Justicia*'s magnificent exposed starboard anchor.

Below right: The huge rudder remains attached to the tail section of *Justicia*'s keel and hull.



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RISK

SCUBA-DIVING IS A SAFE pastime. Yes, incidents occur, some of them serious, but statistically it seems less so than when participating in other adventure pursuits.

That said, there are occasions on which you might find yourself in a difficult situation. When you do, it's likely that anticipating the event and pre-planning will make the difference between a safe return and a life-threatening episode.

I've been a diver for more than 30 years and of course, like many others, I've had a few "moments" during that time; perhaps six or seven dives out of thousands on which I've been in trouble but managed by luck to escape serious injury or worse.

In hindsight I could have avoided or resolved the problems I encountered by using equipment designed and built specifically to deal with such circumstances.

This feature isn't about procedures or training – it's all about kit that's fit for purpose (or not) in the diving environment. Kit I wished I'd had in my BC pocket or had clipped to a D-ring when I was in trouble.

I've learnt a few things over the years with regard to safety gear. There are some items which, when the chips are down, are about as much use as a button on a sock. Other gear I wouldn't get in the water without.

There is some stuff of which myths are made. I'm not saying don't use it, only that there may be times or conditions in which it's not effective. In a risk-critical situation it's better to have safety gear you know will work regardless of the circumstances.

MYTHS REFLECTORS

Mountaineers, trekkers and backpackers off the beaten track often carry reflective signalling devices. By aligning them with the sun and a search team they can signal



Being lost at sea is every diver's nightmare, so which safety devices do you carry in your BC pockets or hung from D-rings? Pausing only to debunk some long-held myths (we'll get letters!) NIGEL WADE runs through the options

ABOVE: Now you can hardly see him...

BELOW: Now you can!

RIGHT: Purpose-made reflector (DAN signalling mirror, US \$5, www.diversalertnetwork.org)... Trouble is, signalling mirrors or reflective CDs can be lost in a billion blinking lights.

their location with the resulting flashing light. These devices are compact, light and, in the right conditions, work like a dream.

It's often recommended that divers carry a compact disc on open-water dives. Divers Alert Network (DAN) also sells signalling mirrors for use at the surface.

Unfortunately, conditions are rarely suitable for these signalling devices to work in a marine environment. The sun needs to be out from behind clouds and your position in relation to the light source and the people you're signalling must be favourable.

Another major factor not taken into account is that your mirrored signal may be lost in a billion blinking and flashing pinpricks of light, as ripples or waves reflect the sun in the same way as a CD or mirror does!

WHISTLES & AUDIBLE DEVICES

In Victorian England, peelers (the police force) used whistles to summon assistance. They were state of the art. I'm sure they worked so well because in those days there was less ambient noise from people, heavy traffic and industry.

The modern equivalent is a VHF radio so I have to ask: why are divers still relying on whistles to attract attention? I know they're small, light, unobtrusive and always there when you need them, but will they actually be heard at distance over the ambient noise of



marine diesel engines, waves slapping the shore or the dive-boat hull and people conversing loudly about their latest underwater adventure?

BRIGHT COLOURS

Fabrics of all types can be dyed in hi-vis colours; commonly called "fluorescent", they are used where being conspicuous adds to the wearer's safety. In diving terms being prominent, especially at the surface, makes sense, so wearing a hi-vis exposure suit or BC would seem a great idea.

What people tend to forget is that the only part of your body likely to be seen at the surface is your head and neck. Also, brightly coloured suits and jackets are hard to find now, with black by far the most popular choice.

I used to dive with the late Alan Dunster. Along with other technical divers from Kingston BSAC, Dunny would wear bright orange cotton mechanic's overalls over his black

CRITICAL



drysuit, and could certainly be seen from a distance under water. The overalls also protected his neoprene suit from abrasion when scrabbling about on deep wrecks.

At the surface, however, his bright overalls were as useful as a chocolate teapot. A brightly coloured hood would be a better choice.

FLARES

Marine flares were once commonplace on offshore marine craft. A crew in trouble could ignite a flare and fire it vertically into the sky. A bright red flame followed by a smoke trail would alert nearby shipping, instigating an emergency response.

For divers, the flares have to be carried in a watertight canister rated to suit the planned maximum dive depths. Unfortunately the flares won't ignite when damp and they have a short shelf-life, so when they're needed most they could let you down with a splutter and a puff.

GLOW-STICKS

A glow-stick is a one-use light source consisting of a sealed clear tube



containing two chemicals and a coloured dye. When the tube is bent the chemicals are released, mix together and the resulting chemical reaction produces light.

Glow-sticks are small, light, water-pressure resistant and require no batteries. They appear ideal for night-dives, but the myth is that these plastic tubes are not biodegradable and seem to end up discarded, littering the seabed or remain attached to permanent moorings and shot-lines on popular night-dive sites.

A handheld torch with rechargeable batteries is the right way to go for night-diving.

LEFT: Brightly coloured exposure suits – snazzy, but they aren't so visible at the surface.

BELOW: These marker buoys are available in any combination of these colours (AP Diving Self-Sealing SMBs with Easifil adaptor, £50, www.apdiving.com)

AT THE SURFACE HIDE-AND-SEEK

Being seen and located at the surface is one of the most important factors in diver safety. I've been left adrift mid-Channel off the UK's busy south-east coast and that's an experience I wouldn't want to repeat or have happen to anyone else.

Lessons learned from this harrowing experience have given rise to my choice of location devices. I've found no substitute for a simple brightly coloured, high-contrast, big and bold delayed surface marker buoy.

I've also learned that colour plays a big part in the game of hide-and-seek between skipper and diver, and that on extreme occasions a more hi-tec approach is needed.

DSMB COLOURS

There are many SMB models but I prefer a long, fat, self-sealing, two-colour buoy with a dedicated inflation system.

The choice of colour should depend on surface light conditions. I wouldn't recommend deploying a yellow buoy if the water surface is reflecting an overcast white sky – an all-black version would then be a far more visible option.

Alternatively, I wouldn't expect a skipper to spot a black marker when the sea surface was reflecting dark clouds – in such conditions a



bright red, orange or yellow marker would be appropriate.

To maximise the chance of being located in all lighting situations, my all-round choice is for a bi-colour fluorescent red and black marker, which anyone looking for me can easily spot on the surface, at distance.

Bi-colour DSMBs have been dismissed as fashion items by a minority of writers on social media and online forums. To them I say: think again. Any colour scheme that enhances a diver's chances of being spotted at the surface is the best colour scheme.

DSMB INFLATION

There are various ways of inflating a DSMB during the ascent phase of a dive. For rebreather divers a "crack bottle" charged from decanted gas from a main dive-tank does the job seamlessly, but these are bulky and problematic to take on overseas trips.

Using an alternative regulator to fill the buoy from the base is very popular and, if done correctly, is a safe option. Using exhaled gas from the primary second stage is another popular choice, one I've used over the years without incident.

An AP Diving Easifil adaptor on its popular self-sealing DSMBs is my current choice. This simple addition enables the buoy to be filled from a direct-feed medium-pressure hose from a bail-out cylinder, drysuit inflator hose



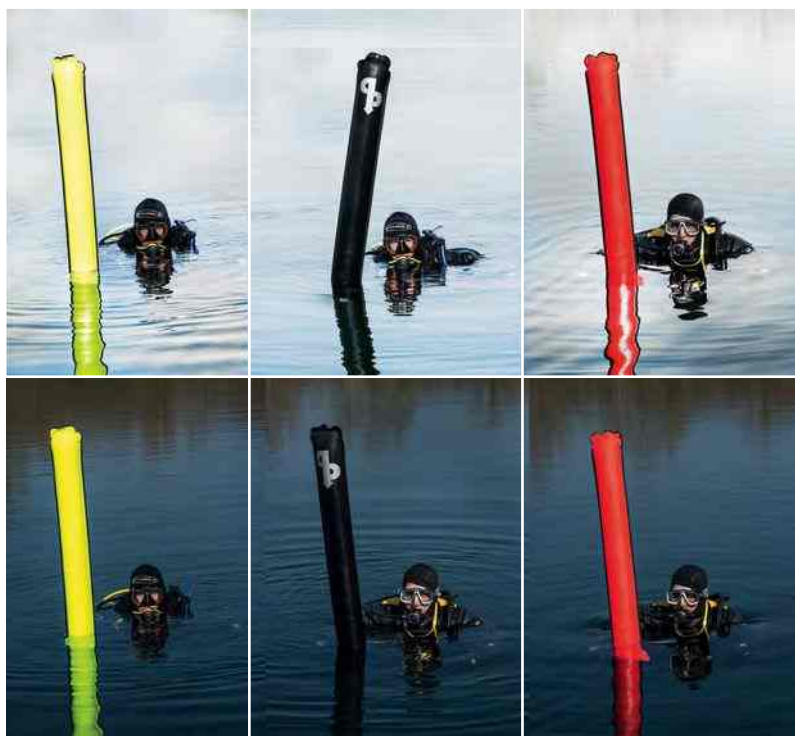
RIGHT: Three different coloured SMBs against water reflecting a white and, below, an overcast sky.

BELOW LEFT: Crack-bottle inflation system designed with rebreather divers in mind.

BOTTOM LEFT: AP Diving Easifil inflation system.

BELOW RIGHT: DSMB deployment is usually conducted during the ascent phase of a dive.

BELOW: Standard reel not designed for travelling (*MGE Ratchet Reel, £44, www.cpspartner-ship.co.uk*) and a compact spool (*Apeks Lifeline 15m, £43. 30m £60. 45m as shown £70, www.apeks-diving.com/uk*)



or a spare hose dedicated to the task when fitted to the first stage.

The Easifil adaptor has no locking groove on the stem, so the hose won't stay attached after the DSMB has been inflated. This makes it a safe, trouble-free operation.

REELS & SPOOLS

A DSMB is of no use unless attached to a line; linking diver to buoy at the surface is essential. Ratchet-reels are among the best tools for this job, as long as they hold enough line to allow deployment from the maximum depth of the dive.

The line needs to be strong enough for the task and the attachment method used at the DSMB end must be secure and foolproof. The reel also has to be tangle- and snag-resistant to be safe to use in any conditions.

Reels can be quite hefty, which causes travelling divers to sacrifice them to meet baggage-weight restrictions. A lightweight compact spool is the answer, leaving no excuses for anyone foolish enough to travel without what I consider the most risk-critical item of safety kit. 🐡





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So thank you to everyone who voted for us we look forward to helping you enjoy some spectacular diving adventures in 2016!



Scuba Travel



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LEFT: A small spool carrying 15m of line is ideal for the travelling diver.

BELOW LEFT: An alternative to a DSMB is this diver's flag (Bowstone Pop-Up Flag, £19, www.bowstonediving.com)

RIGHT: Hi-tec solution to being found, the PLB (McMurdo Fastfind 220, £270, www.mcmurdomarine.com; (not illustrated) ResQLink 180m PLB Canister, £78, www.customdivers.com)

BELOW: Marine radio with built-in GPS (Nautilus Lifeline, £255, www.nautiluslifeline.com)

TOP RIGHT: The Lifeline is mandatory gear with some forward-thinking dive operations.



FLAGS

An alternative to SMBs are emergency flags, commonly stowed down the side of a tank using shock cord and deployed post-dive at the surface. The model pictured has a folding three-section tubular pole that when extended measures about 2m, with a hi-vis rectangular nylon flag to aid location.

The whole set-up is light and compact when stowed and is suitable for all conditions at home or overseas.

HI-TEC DEVICES

If you should be left adrift in the vast expanse of an ocean, being found as quickly as possible is the priority. Search & rescue services (SARS) base their reaction to emergency calls on "speed of response" and "weight of attack", which equates to how quickly they can start the search and how many personnel are needed.

If you are lost at the surface with no

way of enhancing your visibility, the search will take time and may involve boats, spotter planes or coastguard helicopters. The difficulty for the SARS is immense.

Of course, if you can send a coded emergency signal with your exact GPS location in real time to dedicated satellites, you're as good as found...



EPIRBs

Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons (EPIRBs) are used to alert SARS in an emergency. They transmit a coded message on the 406MHz distress frequency via satellite and earth stations to the nearest rescue co-ordination centre.

Some EPIRBs have built-in GPS, enabling the SARS to locate the beacon to within 100m.

EPIRBs are generally installed on boats, registered to a specific craft and so not used by individuals.

PLBs

Personal Location Beacons (PLBs) have the same alerting and location ability as 406MHz EPIRBs. The signal transmitted has the same power and is effective worldwide, on land, air or at sea.

The main difference is that PLBs are small enough to be



carried in a BC pocket. They aren't generally depth-rated for recreational diving so need to be placed in a dedicated waterproof case, but they are water resistant and can be used at the surface.

Adding a GPS-enabled PLB with depth-rated case to your safety armoury is last-resort stuff, but can be a life-saver.

MARINE RADIOS

An alternative to EPIRBs and PLBs is a dedicated location device that incorporates a marine radio. One such product is the Nautilus Lifeline, a VHF marine rescue radio that can transmit a distress message giving its GPS location up to 34 miles across any water surface conditions to in-range marine vessels.

Alternatively the Lifeline's in-built marine radio can be used to voice-call the wheelhouse radio on your dive-boat.

The unit comes in a waterproof clip-top housing depth rated to 130m and is becoming popular with dive operations and liveaboard operators worldwide. Sometimes it's supplied to visiting divers as mandatory dive-kit.

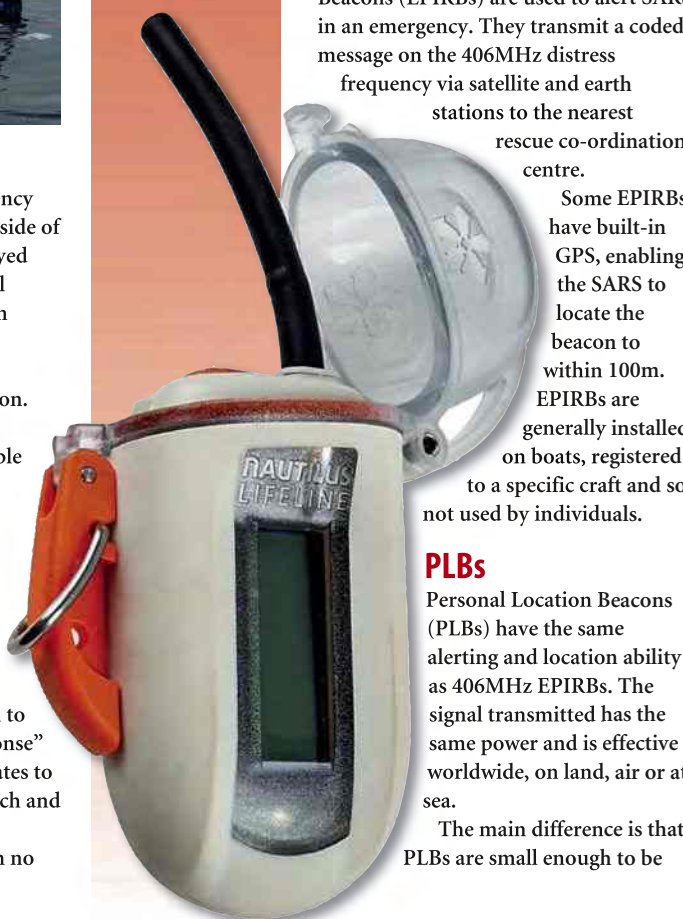
LIGHTS

Whether you're under water or on the surface, a good hand-held light is essential safety kit, especially on dusk and night dives. Being able to see and read crucial information on computers and gauges is as risk-critical as it gets.

In daylight hours a bright LED torch can help you find your way in the dark confines of overhead environments, so avoiding hazards such as sharp protrusions, lines and fishing-nets. At the surface it can be used to signal your whereabouts.

LIGHT MODES

Some hand-held lamps boast an internationally recognised Morse Code





SOS, dot-dot-dot-dash-dash-dash flashing strobe mode. I prefer a red-light mode on the lamps I use, because this doesn't destroy night vision and is instantly recognisable, both at depth and at the surface.

I carry a tiny mask-mounted red light from Exposure Marine whenever I dive. It's unobtrusive, has a perfect output, can be easily seen but doesn't interfere with my or my buddy's night vision.

Battery duration or burntimes are also an important factor. I can't imagine how frustrating and precarious it would be to have the batteries die just as the situation spiralled out of control.



ABOVE: Torch with red light and white SOS mode (FIT LED 1200WSR, £250, www.uwvisions.com)



LEFT: This tiny red light packs a punch. Mounted on a mask-strap, it won't ruin night vision (Exposure Marine XS100-Red Night Vision, £65. www.ultimatesportsengineering.com/exposure-marine)

STROBES

Small strobe-lights are useful safety aids – they can be attached to a shotline under water in poor visibility to assist in locating a predetermined exit route, be clipped to a BC shoulder for instant surface recognition or be attached to the tip of a DSMB or flag for night-time location.

UNDER WATER EXPECT THE WORST

A simple, leisurely dive can quickly turn into something altogether different. Conditions can change unexpectedly under water. Many factors can quickly reduce visibility, including poor buoyancy skills and strong, unpredictable currents that force divers deeper, shallower or further from the exit point or boat than planned.

Wherever there are fish there will be fishermen, whether using rod and line or full-scale netting techniques. Nets and lines get snagged and the

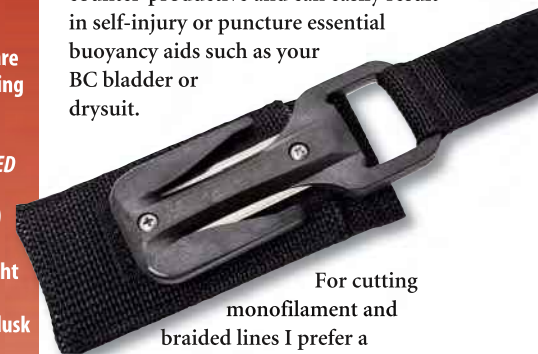
anglers have to pull for a break and discard them.

Wrecks are popular fishing grounds, and it's here that the risk is greatest to the diver. Entanglement can be serious and can quickly become life-threatening.

KNIVES & CUTTERS

Knives come in all shapes and sizes, from massive stainless-steel Bowie knives to small blunt-point titanium models, but are especially useful if the blades carries small serrations for sawing through thick ropes.

Pointed stiletto blades I believe are counter-productive and can easily result in self-injury or puncture essential buoyancy aids such as your BC bladder or drysuit.



BELOW: Strobes are ideal for identifying an exit route or shotline at night (Northern Diver LED Strobe, £25, www.ndiver.com)

LEFT: A bright light flashing the SOS signal, good for dusk and night dives.

RIGHT: Line-cutter (Ezycut Trilobite £20, www.eezycut.com)

For cutting monofilament and braided lines I prefer a dedicated line-cutter with replaceable surgically sharp blades.

An alternative to knives and cutters are scissors, and the trauma shears used in the medical profession are ideal. Dive Rite produces a pair of titanium shears that are tough, light and corrosion-proof.

ALTERNATIVE GAS SUPPLY

Bail-out tanks and pony cylinders can get you out of a serious jam and are rightly mandatory kit for solo divers, but it's best not to allow a predicament to occur in the first place.

Good gas-management and constant monitoring of gauges and instruments is the cornerstone of safe diving.

CURRENT HOOKS

A robust stainless-steel hook is a safety measure in strong currents, though it should be deployed on rocks to prevent damage to corals and living structures.

The hook and line combination is a useful addition to anyone's armoury, especially for underwater photographers with only one hand free for battling a current.





GLOVES

More and more we see gloves banned from use in popular destinations such as the Egyptian Red Sea.

Dive operators see underwater eco-systems being damaged and assume that any guest diver wearing gloves may be tempted to grab hold of delicate corals and marine life.

However shot- and permanent mooring lines in tropical destinations attract marine growth, some of which can sting or cut, leaving injuries that can lead to shock or later infection.

This, I believe, is where the use of gloves needs to be reconsidered, especially in areas prone to current, where getting a firm grip on an ascent line is a sensible option.

MASKS

I can't finish the underwater section without mentioning spare masks. Should you find yourself in a situation in which your mask has let you down because of a split skirt, broken strap or buckle, or it just won't defog, a spare tucked into a BC pocket will prove a godsend.

Reading instruments is an imperative operation and without a mask that can't happen.

A spare mask should be a well-used model that won't fog up without a propriety defogging agent and is small enough to slip into a BC pocket.

SUMMARY

The safety equipment featured here reflects my preferences and should not be regarded as an alternative to safe dive-planning, diving practices or gaining qualifications through established training agencies.

I would also stress that you shouldn't have to stuff your BC pockets full, or hang useless items on D-rings.

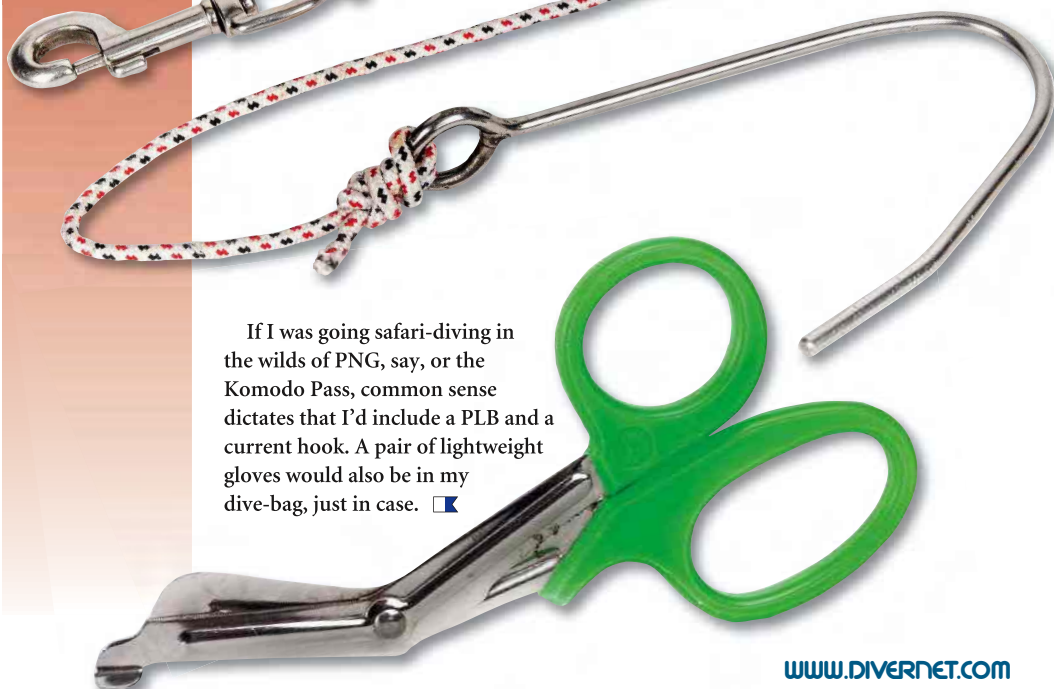
For me a simple line-cutter, tiny red torch, DSMB with spool and spare mask go wherever I dive, and they take up very little space in my BC pockets or attached to D-rings.

RIGHT: Stinging hydroids and sharp mussel shells can grow on permanent lines...

ABOVE: Lightweight gloves can prevent cuts and stings / Macwet Climatic Gloves, £30. www.macwet.com

BELOW RIGHT: Nigel's homemade current hook has proved to be a useful safety aid.

BOTTOM: Trauma shears as used in the medical profession make ideal line cutters. Those shown below are Nigel Wade's cheap shears, but you can buy Dive Rite titanium trauma shears for £30. (www.sea-sea.com)

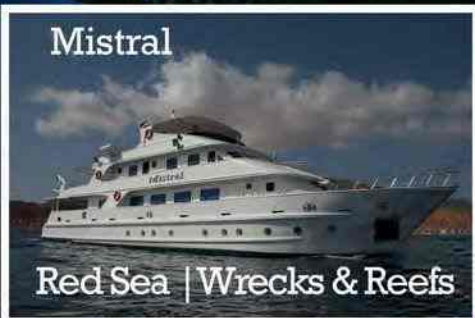


If I was going safari-diving in the wilds of PNG, say, or the Komodo Pass, common sense dictates that I'd include a PLB and a current hook. A pair of lightweight gloves would also be in my dive-bag, just in case. ■



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TREWAVAS



BEAUTIFUL FREAKS

IS THERE ANYTHING WEIRDER-LOOKING than a hammerhead shark?

I mean, who would design an animal with a shovel-shaped head, and stick an eye on each side like that? It's bonkers; improbably bizarre. And of course, for many divers, it's a total must-see.

But you have to go a long way if you want the chance of diving with a hammerhead. And sadly, given the rate at which all types of sharks are being systematically slaughtered for their fins, it's wise to go sooner rather than later.

Fortunately I had the chance to travel to Ecuador, and a visit to the Galapagos Islands was my top priority. When you're a diver and you've reached a small dot of an island in the middle of a vast ocean, it feels only natural to take a tiny boat to some remote outcrop of rock, and fling yourself in. That's just who we are.

"Right now is a good time. We're seeing hammerheads at Gordon Rocks," the dive-guide tells me. And I'm smiling away and thinking: "Yeah yeah, well wouldn't that be lovely?"

I've heard it all before: dive-guides reeling off a list of the desirable marine life that "might" be seen at a particular site. And perhaps one time somebody really did see a sunfish, some dolphins and a couple of manta rays. But usually, as the story goes, you should have been here *last week*.

The current is strong as we descend. It blasts through the channels between the rocks and switches unpredictably at different depths.

The volcanic rock is sharp, and the giant barnacles are sharper still. Luckily I'm wearing gloves.

I face into the current to stop the mask being ripped from my face and fight to steady my GoPro.

Almost immediately, as if on cue, a large hammerhead shark skirts across the rocks and eyeballs us. So close! It feels like an encounter with an extra-terrestrial.

I look straight at the guide, and even my hand-signals are pumping with the excitement. I am so pleased to have seen this shark.

The guide motions us deeper, edging towards the bottom of the channel. We pull ourselves down across the rocks. Our bubbles fly almost horizontal, our grabbing hands grab all we can. We jostle for position: all for ourselves, after all. It's a competitive world.

A moment later, my breath simply stops in my chest. There are more hammerhead sharks here than I can count or comprehend – all different sizes; weaving forwards, cruising effortlessly. You could dive for a lifetime and never witness anything like this number of sharks.

When I remember to breathe again, my perspective has changed.

A lone hammerhead shark looks like an alien freak. But a school of 60-plus hammerhead sharks together, slinking lazily into the current... suddenly they look astonishingly graceful. Suddenly the hammerhead looks like the most natural shape in the world for a shark to be.

So maybe it's true – everything counts in large amounts.

It's a raw but sunny weekend at Chesil Beach. A lone kitted-up diver appears clumsy and strange. But 60-plus divers, staggering in and out of the surf, falling on their arses and crawling over the stones in full kit... Well, we just look like a bunch of escaped circus rejects.

So maybe not.

'USUALLY, AS THE STORY GOES, YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN HERE LAST WEEK'

LOUISE TREWAVAS

DIVER AWARDS

THE DIVER AWARDS, the original and most highly valued commendations for the UK diving industry, have come of age – the latest round of voting marks the 18th year in which they have rewarded the people who help to make your diving possible.

Once again readers have been generous with

their time and filled in the voting forms either in **DIVER** or online.

Only properly completed entries are included in the tally, of course. While we recognise that answers in a particular category may be omitted here and there through unfamiliarity (if you never use liveboards, for instance), if only one or two

categories are completed that might well disqualify the entry.

The Awards – which have a new blue look this year to mark that 18th landmark – were set to be presented in public at the London International Dive Show at the ExCeL Centre in early February.

The winners and runners-up will collect their

PRODUCT of the YEAR

1st: Suunto EON Steel
2nd: Fourth Element Arctic Expedition
3rd: AP Diving 2020 Vision

Last year a certain action camera was sweeping the board in this category, but the GoPro has perhaps now become part of the scenery.

So first place this year goes to last year's Newcomer winner – Suunto's EON Steel dive-computer. Complete with high-definition customisable backlit colour screen, the model became very popular last year, premium price-tag notwithstanding.

In second place is a one-piece thermal undersuit from Fourth Element, the Arctic Expedition. The manufacturer used an innovative combination of hi-tec fabrics and



bio-mapping to create a garment suitable for extreme conditions.

AP Diving came third with the 2020 Vision rebreather handset. Its liquid-crystal display, conditional colouring of text and graphics and other features clearly had a big impact for a CCR accessory to make the top three.

BRAND of the YEAR

1st: Scubapro
2nd: Suunto
3rd: Apeks

It's been a few years since Scubapro topped this category but now it's back, one of the few remaining "one-stop shops" for divers. It's still innovating, too, as it shown with popular products such as the Mantis M1 computer, MK25 EVO / A700 Black Tech regs and Evertec drysuits

and Everflex semi-drys.

Suunto, last year's winner, drops to second – still a highly creditable result, one reason for which must be the EON Steel computer. But everything from the entry-level D4 up wins the company admirers, not forgetting its enviable reputation for customer service.

Apeks is back in the running with a good third placing. Long a popular choice with UK technical divers for its commitment to quality,

innovation and reliability, we see a lot of XTX 200s about – we've also seen a lot of those "limited edition" Black Sapphires about!



RETAILER of the YEAR

1st: Simply Scuba
2nd: Mike's
3rd: UnderwaterWorld

After so many years as top dog, Simply Scuba is the dive retailer everyone else must look to beat. Not that simple, apparently, because this is its seventh straight victory!

It stands out in that it isn't simply

a successful online retailer with a very wide range of products on offer but also has a physical presence in the form of its shop in Faversham, Kent.

Mike's hasn't featured in the Awards for some years but it has come storming in at number two after running what was clearly a very effective campaign among satisfied customers. Its outlet is in west London – Mike may be gone but Scuba Steve is flying the flag.

And into third place comes Stoney Cove's retail outlet UnderwaterWorld, which naturally benefits from being a shop that's actually near diveable water.



TOUR OPERATOR of the YEAR

1st: Scuba Travel
2nd: blue o two
3rd: Oonasdivers

As with Retailer of the Year, one company has virtually claimed ownership of this category – Scuba Travel already has 10 **DIVER** Awards in its showcase.

How does Tony Backhurst do it, in a sector in which the success or failure of a diving holiday can be dictated by conditions beyond human control?

It has to be sheer hard work to engender that consistent level of loyalty among clients, and that goes for all of our top three.

In fact, the hierarchy in the travel sector of the UK dive trade appears



so set in stone that not only does Scuba Travel retain top spot but blue o two retains second and Oonasdivers third. It was the same in 2013 too.

All three companies continue to diversify their offerings to reflect shifts in demand – and their skills and knowledge will no doubt be tested to the full in 2016.

2015

trophies and certificates, but what really counts for everyone is being able to claim with every justification that they are a top choice of the readers of Britain's best-selling diving magazine – the diving community.

That has to be worth its weight in new and repeat business!



DIVER AWARDS

DIVER AWARDS

The DIVER Awards are presented on the DIVER Stage at the London International Dive Show at the ExCeL Centre at 2pm on Saturday, 13 February

LIVEBOARD of the YEAR



1st: blue Horizon
2nd: Whirlwind
3rd: blue Melody

We take liveaboards for granted but it takes a lot of savvy and skill to keep a bunch of divers happy, safe and fulfilled, to the point where they're thinking about rebooking even before they've disembarked.

So we don't underestimate what it takes to score consistently in this category. blue o two had a good

DIVER Awards result in its role as a tour operator, and has done even better with the liveaboard fleet with which it started in business.

Its Red Sea vessels have established themselves as firm favourites with divers, and *blue Horizon* takes the title yet again (it's getting to be a habit). And it also takes third slot with *blue Melody*.

Rival Scuba Travel also has its feet in both camps, and its liveaboard *Whirlwind* repeats its runner-up performance of 2014.

DESTINATION of the YEAR

1st: Egypt
2nd: Maldives
3rd: Malta

No changes in this category, though perhaps for the first time the heat is really on the perennial leader now.



Egypt still scored highly in 2015 but if travel restrictions to Sinai remain in place for any length of time, and if the diving public decides to vote with its feet, who knows what will happen in 2016?

However, with liveaboards and faster day-boats accessing prime sites from the mainland and access via Hurghada and Marsa Alam at present unaffected, the country has every chance of overcoming the problems that beset its tourism.

The Maldives has its own political turmoil but can only have gained ground in its position as second favourite. Malta has made third spot its own recently, and with the climb-down over the weird homicide charges that threatened to make it very unpopular with divers (see *News*) there is every reason for it to remain a top dive destination.

DIVE CENTRE of the YEAR

1st: Camel Dive Club
2nd: Stoney Cove
3rd: Red Sea Diving Safari

Camel is a long-established dive centre in Sharm el Sheikh, but it took quite a few years before it attained top spot in this category of the DIVER Awards. Once there, it has shown no inclination to vacate its lofty perch, and has now won the past three titles.

Leicestershire's Stoney Cove, the National Diving Centre and Britain's best-known inland dive-site, came third last year and now steps up to second. Its retail outlet also scored a direct hit this year.

Red Sea Diving Safari is the "eco-diving adventure" in quiet southern Egypt with camps at Marsa Shagra, Marsa Nakari and Wadi Lahami giving access to a number of desirable sites. Divers clearly like it, as it slipped smartly into third place.



NEWCOMER of the YEAR

1st: Atomic Venom
2nd: Santi Ladies First
3rd: FIT Pro 2500 Flare

This category covers everything from products to companies that emerged in the past year, but once again it is products that made the impact. Atomic's Venom frameless mask used a new material the Americans call "Gummy Bear" silicon, and DIVER's Technical Editor Nigel Wade reckons that combined with ultra-clear glass in the frameless mount it has set standards for fit, seal, comfort and design. Genuinely innovative.

A close runner-up was the Santi Ladies First Drysuit. "What sets it apart from its contemporaries is its flattering, feminine cut, enhancing



not only its appearance but the overall comfort factor," was DIVER's test verdict.

The versatile FIT Pro 2500 Flare unit functions effectively as a video light for action cams, stills camera focusing, fluorescence shooting, emergencies or as a torch. Add long burntimes and it's a worthy third.



BIG PARTY IN WHITE VALLEY

WE'RE ON OUR WAY out for an afternoon dive, but first we make a detour to a fish-processing plant. An old hull at the quay groans under the weight of discarded fish-heads, mostly from big tuna, though the stench is less overpowering than I expect.

One of the crew of our TopDive boat leaps onto the heap and selects more than a dozen heads, tossing them into a perforated cylindrical container.

He is about to jump back when he notices an unusually large, dark head with starry white spots, grabs it and rams that in too. I can't identify the species, and on asking I'm told it's from a "deepwater salmon".

We motor out to the White Valley dive-site, where the lidded bucket is set down on a flat area of seabed in about 18m. As its contents start wafting fragrant signals through the water, we back-roll in.

We've been told to settle close to some coral outcrops, and to be aware that hidden eels can venture out of the coral and take divers by surprise. But any thoughts of marauding morays are rapidly driven from my mind.

The action is already well underway as we take our places for an hour-long live show. It's a gob-smacking scene that's about to smack even harder. The fish-head container is now at the vortex of a swirling mass of sizeable fish that all

seem to know their place in a hierarchy.

The restless mass rises and falls, bunches and extends, its base formed by blue-striped snapper with a dense layer of chunky humpback red snapper above them.

These snapper I reckon to be among the most photogenic of fish, with their grey-to-ruddy flanks, fiery-coloured pectoral fins and "faces" that at times can appear cartoon-human. They're wonderful to watch.

There are other fish in the swirl too – thousands of bluestreak fusiliers, big lone emperors and blubberlips snapper. Preferring a lofty overview, jack patrol at a higher level.



As when reading a book or watching a film, **STEVE WEINMAN** likes to avoid spoilers and arrive open-minded at an unfamiliar destination ready for what he hopes will be pleasant surprises. So how would the tourist heart of French Polynesia measure up?



Left: A tiger shark at the start of the afternoon gathering at Tahiti's White Valley...

Above: The divers are gathering too.

Below: The party in full swing.

Several sizes up are the grey reef sharks, also present in numbers, less frenetic but still keen not to miss out on this social occasion.

Humans who can't resist the aroma and warmth of high-street coffee-shops are induced to pay way over the odds for a hot beverage. Similarly, these Pacific islanders can't resist the odour of rotting tuna and the electrical activity generated by mass movement of marine life.

I'm transfixed by the central spectacle, but also trying to take in what's happening on the periphery in the 20m-or-so visibility. Sharks come and go at a bewildering rate, including one or two large lemons, but they play it cool and don't hang around for long.

But lemon sharks are not the apex predator here, because the tiger sharks are out in force this fine afternoon, and once you lock onto them, everything else becomes background.

It turns out that there are four specimens around, which is highly



As in those bar-brawls in old Westerns, where a character actor crawls out from the melee, straightens his Stetson, picks up a chair and dives back into the fray, so from time to time a baffled-looking porcupinefish, a titan triggerfish, an unattached remora or even, comically, a tiny butterflyfish emerges, reflects briefly on what the hell it's doing there, and then decides to stay in the moment and plunge back into the *bouillabaisse*.

AND THEN THERE ARE the sharks. Blacktips, dozens of them, chase around like over-excited dogs. As faithful as canines, they are our constant companions in French Polynesia.





unusual. And even on the scale of these stripy big boys, one of the four is such a giant that for a moment I have that rare experience of hardly believing my eyes.

It happens when a vast body descends almost vertically onto the bucket, like a nose-diving zeppelin, not far from where I'm perched. I must have done a comical double-take, because this tiger is a good 4.5m long and built like a Sumo.

Clouds of sediment billow out, small fish shoot from the point of impact like shrapnel, and for a moment the shark appears to have bored its head straight into the sand. Its insane momentum must have popped the hinged bucket-lid, but it just shakes its head, somehow extricates itself and propels its bulk ponderously up and away.

As it bombs directly over my head and I instinctively lean backwards, I can see that it's holding in its mouth a spotty trophy. It dawns on me that the deep-sea salmon's head is now the dish of the day.

What seems a long time later, I look down and notice a green moray halfway out of its hole and gurning away beside me. In the grand scheme of things, it doesn't seem that big a deal.

Top: This image gives an idea of the sheer size of the biggest of the tiger sharks.

Above: The shark makes an impression on the bait tin... and emerges with its prize.

Below: Moray eels put themselves out there but find it hard competing for attention.

WE'RE DIVING WITH TOPDIVE, the dive centre for the Intercontinental Tahiti Resort on the island of Tahiti itself. Its three boats visit a dozen sites, but the White Valley dive must surely be the jewel in the crown.

French Polynesia is renowned for its exciting big-animal diving in the current-filled passes of outer islands such as Rangiroa and Fakarava, as described graphically by Mark Hatter in **DIVER** (*Spectacular Tahiti*, November).

It's a long, long journey to the hub island of Tahiti from the UK, however,

and even longer for those continuing to the outer islands.

Given that these days there are some surprisingly competitive packages for flights and luxury accommodation on Tahiti and nearby Moorea (it's all relative!), I wanted to find out what these central islands can offer divers.

And it turns out that what they lack in currents and passes to attract pelagics, they make up for with regular if discreet use of essential oils – or chum.

I'm well aware that for some divers attracting sharks (this isn't "feeding" as such, though that big mama tiger shark may not have recognised the distinction) is unacceptable. I respect their views – this destination may not be for them.

I also spoke to one or two non-divers living in Tahiti and Moorea who worry that one serious incident could have far-reaching consequences for the important tourist business.

My personal opinion is unchanged – it is that respecting sharks and giving them a value as creatures to be admired rather than executed is, provided it's sensibly administered, a Good Thing.

THE VISIT TO WHITE VALLEY I've just described, one of three, came on my first day in Tahiti. The flight had seemed interminable – an early-morning hop to Paris to link up with Air Tahiti Nui, a 12-hour flight to LA (plus three hours on the runway at Charles de Gaulle waiting for a computer part), a short stopover and another eight hours south-west across the Pacific.





Above: One of the three Topdive boats at the Intercontinental resort in Tahiti.

Below: Humpback red snapper at the White Valley site.



Yet because of the time difference it was still Monday when I reached the welcoming Intercontinental, which is blessedly close to the airport.

Tahiti is the largest of the Windward group in French Polynesia's Society Islands. Most inhabitants live around the coast, including the capital Papeete – the majority are Polynesians, with some 30% Europeans and Chinese.

The ancient Polynesians arrived in these remote islands from Asia by canoe and today they are worldbeaters at canoe-racing. Most children learn the sport at

school and when you're out on the dive-boat you'll see many a canoe tear by with bare-chested, intricately tattooed men paddling furiously, as if off to war.

Our diving life-style was far more relaxed. My warm-up dive at Three Pitons had seemed promising as the dive-boat headed across only slightly choppy waters, with a pod of bottlenose dolphins leaping enthusiastically in our bow wave and a humpback whale and calf offering a generous display as they rolled together off the port side.

You don't see that every day – except 🐳





it seems that you do in Tahiti in early October.

The whales are around for some three months until late October, ready to mate and breed before returning to the South Pole.

One thing I didn't see once submerged was colourful coral – rather scrappy hard corals were the order of the day. Trois Pitons was typical, the pinnacles perhaps affected by exposure to El Niño conditions as well as human activity over the years.

A small group of yellow snapper

followed me around at close quarters like pilotfish, and clearly had experience of divers as a food source. A small turtle rested high on one of the pitons, some lone titan triggerfish raced around and small lionfish and grouper lurked in a crevice, but there was nothing to presage the delights to come after lunch.

Revisiting this site later in the week was more fun, however, with the snapper multiplied, another relaxed turtle allowing a close approach until it was time for it to take a breather, and a titan



triggerfish that took to my buddy Lionel and me in a big way.

Normally I'm cautious around these pugnacious fish but this one was clearly not nesting or defending territory out in mid water, and simply detected that there was something fishy about Lionel, who sported a shroud of dogged snapper throughout the dive.

There were grey reef sharks resting near the shot at the start and finish of the dive and a sprawling housing estate of anemones for a small population of clownfish and black damsels.

It was a pleasant enough site, but we couldn't keep away from White Valley. Sometimes the guides like to take you for a tour of the site before settling down for the main course, but we all knew it was just delayed gratification.

When we did this tour, the billed drift turned out to be a mild slog across the current. There were plenty of lone sharks and a shoal of barracuda to watch, but I was glad to reach the chum-site again.

This time I was nearest to the bucket and at times felt engulfed in the action, particularly in a heavy swell that made it hard to remain upright, but no tiger sharks appeared this time, or the time after that. The currents had strengthened and the action seemed more stretched out into ribbons of activity.

It was always absorbing, but I'd been spoilt by that thrilling initial experience.

ONE AFTERNOON WE WENT whale-watching. We had seen humpbacks on most of our dive-boat rides and we saw them today, but the plan on these



Top: Blacktip sharks were constant companions in Tahiti and especially Moorea.

Above right: Once back on the dive-boat, it was always worth keeping an eye out for passing humpback whales.

Left: A turtle heads up for a breather.

trips is to try to join them in the water.

Now I freely admit that my speed-snorkelling skills in hot pursuit of big creatures leave much to be desired. On at least one occasion that afternoon, however, my slackness paid off.

I saw the rest of the pack ahead stop, and turned back to see a humpback breaching not 10m away, but I was never likely to translate that luck into usable pictures. Doug Allen has nothing to fear.

However, I should mention the finale to that second Trois Pitons dive, as we were starting to think about ascending for a safety stop. As the dive-guide pointed urgently up and away my gaze followed his finger, but I could make out nothing but what seemed a large area of shadow.

My focus was all wrong – I was looking for something smaller.

It was only as the shadow moved out of range that I twigged that a humpback whale had just passed overhead. My brain just hadn't been programmed for that.

TRANSFERRING TO MOOREA to the west of Tahiti was easy. From Papeete a frequent car ferry does the journey in 45 minutes, then it's a taxi ride through a mountainous and lushly vegetated landscape to the north-west coast and another Intercontinental resort, but one built on a more intimate scale – the Intercontinental Moorea Resort & Spa.

Both this and the Tahiti beachfront resort achieve that desirable but harder-than-it-looks balance of quiet opulence combined with the sort of pleasant informality you want on holiday, with good food and friendly service.



Above: The rays on Moorea that give Eagle Ray Valley its name.

Below: This triggerfish and a load of snapper take an instant liking to the dive-guide.

In both cases it's a short stroll to professionally run and well-equipped dive centres with nitrox and 15-litre cylinders if you want them. Tahiti's resort has 245 accommodation units of all types, subtly spread out, while Moorea has 144.

The diving I experienced on Moorea was characterised not so much by the 20m-deep sites themselves as by the posse of humans, fish and small sharks that would be milling around them.

We might be briefed to look out for sessile life such as nudibranchs or stonefish in the meadows of pleasant hard coral at ridge-and-canyon sites such as Coral Walls and Lemon Shark Valley, but it's hard to get in the mood for macro meandering when the Pied-Piper guides always carry a little chum with them, and we bring the marine life along with us.

So it was more entertaining to treat the dives as the equivalent of

taking the dogs for a walk, and simply enjoy the view and the company.

The blacktip sharks and snapper were usually there, and trigger and butterflyfish and the odd turtle would come and go. The blacktips would fondly accompany us all the way back to the boat-ladder.

What stood out for me was Eagle Ray Corridor, where my buddy Philippe and I followed the reef wall on a gentle drift. There wasn't that much to see until, about 20 minutes in, a squadron of eagle rays appeared overhead.


We elected to leave the rest of the group and finned back against the current to catch them as they returned, rejoining the others later in the shallows to bibble about looking for subjects to photograph.

THROUGHOUT MY STAY I enjoyed excellent topside guidance from Tui from Tahiti Tourisme, and she went beyond the call of duty when I returned from Moorea on a Saturday night, driving me east across Tahiti Nui to quiet Tahiti Iti so that I could spend a night in my own hilltop retreat overlooking the sea.

Vanira Lodge was a good place to off-gas, because sadly there was no time left by now to dive this far end of the island.

The 2015 El Niño weather had been unpredictable in French Polynesia but luckily it was kind to me.

This had been a distinctive diving experience in which we rarely needed to go looking for big marine life – it came right at us, allowing plenty of time to get accustomed to each other's company.

That was certainly a great privilege for me; I can't speak for the marine life. 



FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▶ Air Tahiti Nui flies from Paris, Los Angeles, Tokyo and Auckland to Tahiti, with connecting flights from London with Virgin Atlantic, www.airtahitinui.co.uk

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION ▶ Topdive Tahiti and Topdive Moorea are PADI 5* centres, www.topdive.com. InterContinental Tahiti Resort & Spa, www.ihg.com; InterContinental Moorea Resort & Spa, www.moorea.intercontinental.com; Vanira Lodge, www.vaniralodge.com

WHEN TO GO ▶ Year-round, average water temperature 26°C. Wettest months November-April.

LANGUAGE ▶ French, Tahitian.

MONEY ▶ Pacific franc (CFP or XPF), pegged to the euro. Credit cards widely accepted.

PRICES ▶ Return fares with Air Tahiti Nui to Papeete via LA from £1450. Intercontinental Tahiti Resort rooms from £140 per night, Intercontinental Moorea Resort & Spa from £229, Vanira Lodge from £83. 10-dive inter-island pass with TopDive 85,000 CFP. Whale-watching 11,000 CFP.

VISITOR INFORMATION ▶ For more on the islands of Tahiti, tour-operator package deals and special offers visit www.tahiti-tourisme.co.uk





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Clockwise from top left: The dive-site looks formidable; a diver battles the swift river currents to photograph salmon; ...that display an irrepressible urge to spawn in the rivers of Norway.



TRUE NORTH



Diving with wild salmon, the Aston Villa (in its own relegation zone), medusas and ghost

sharks – northern Norway is full of underwater surprises, say **MICHAEL SALVAREZZA & CHRISTOPHER WEAVER**

I T WAS QUITE A JOURNEY to get to this spot. A five-hour drive into Nordland from Trondheim, a half-mile trek through the forest to get the divers, dive-gear and camera equipment to the site, and a rope rappel down a 9m mud and rock slope to the river's edge. And we were not yet in the water.

As we looked over the tumultuous waters of the river rapids, we wondered if we really were going to dive in this roiling maelstrom. But that's where the salmon were, and our best opportunity

to photograph them as they marched upstream to spawn was right below the whitewater rapids, in a shallow pool where we hoped to catch a glimpse, and snatch some images.

So, after attaching a safety rope to prevent us being whisked downstream, we dropped below the surface current to a relatively calm pocket of water and began to search for these remarkable fish.

Above us the water tumbled at rocket speed, but descending just a few feet below the surface got us out of the



SVEN GUST

journey to the land where Vikings once ruled took us to the north to search for salmon, and deep into some of the fjords along the coast to explore historic shipwrecks, lush gardens of kelp and unique geological features.

Along the way, we searched for rare, little-understood deepwater organisms. Visitors are often impressed by the beautiful countryside, the warm and welcoming culture of the Norwegians and, if they are fortunate, the dazzling Northern Lights. But it is under water where some of Norway's true treasures, and best-kept secrets, can be found.

From the forest wilderness we arrived at Namsen Fjord, a picturesque fjord along the western coast of Norway 100 miles north of the city of Trondheim.

Here we explored the sunken wreck of the *Hamo*, a freighter sunk in a local harbour in 21m.

The wreck is covered with organisms and offers terrific photo-opportunities in an easy setting. In reality, however, diving the *Hamo* is just a tune-up for a

dive on the wreck of HMT *Aston Villa*.

The *Aston Villa*, launched as a trawler, was requisitioned in September 1939 to serve as an anti-submarine vessel. She came under heavy fire off the Norwegian coast in May 1940 from German forces, and suffered significant damage.

Considered unable to cross the North Sea to reach safety and repair, she was then intentionally sunk alongside the steep wall of the fjord to keep her out of enemy hands.

Today, a dive on this wreck represents a descent into a little-known aspect of Norwegian history. It lies at a sharp downward angle, its mangled stern section reachable in relatively shallow water at 18m and its intact bow at 29m, pointing to deeper water.

AFTER EXPLORING these wrecks, we turned our attention to the mouth of the fjord, where it reaches the open Norwegian Sea. Here, along a rocky coast strewn with boulders and small islands, we prepared to dive lush gardens of kelp in search of wolf-fish, anglerfish and other endemic creatures.

current. Using large boulders and rocks to shield us from the furious flow, we pushed forward, and before long spotted our quarry – stocky Norwegian salmon swimming furiously against the downstream current.

After attempting unsuccessfully to leap up a small waterfall slightly upstream from this spot, many of them were now resting in this pocket of water. This was our photographic opportunity.

Still, this was no an easy task. Pushing the cameras through the force of the rapids, locking the focus onto the subject and squeezing off the desired shots took all our effort. This was diving the frontier of Norway – and our expedition had only just begun.

FOR DIVERS, NORWAY offers quite a palette of fascinating opportunities. Our

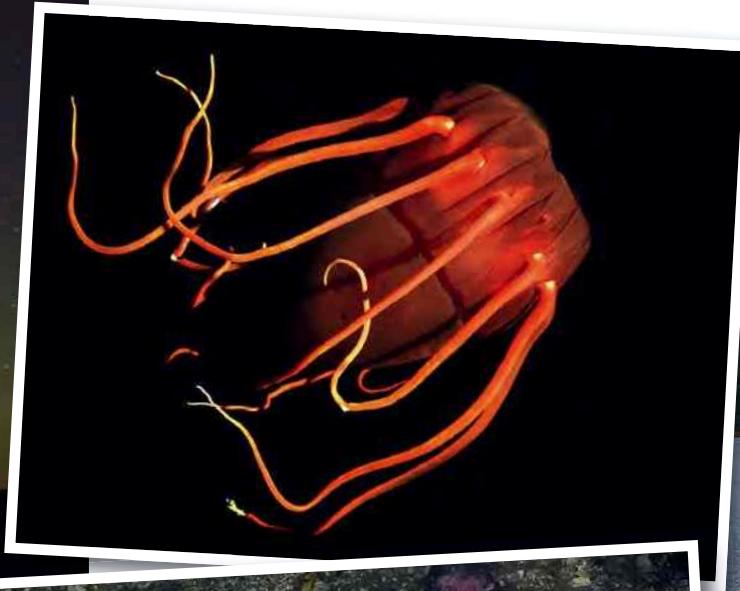
Top: Christopher Weaver explores the *Hamo*.

Above: The *Aston Villa* wreck is a reminder of the horrors of World War Two.

Above right: The Aurora Borealis over a fjord.

Below, from left: A rare blue-coloured lobster; *Flabellina nobilis* nudibranch; this jellyfish was seen in the kelp gardens of Namsfjord.





Descending into 18m of clear, cold North Atlantic water, we swayed gently in the surge while we explored cracks and fissures, photographing invertebrates and small fish.

This area of Norway is little-explored under water. Virtually any spot along the coast could represent a compelling dive-site, and more are being discovered all the time.

Unlike other established destinations, few divers have seen the dive-sites here, and they are so new and unexplored that they don't even have names.

Our journey into Norway's underwater frontier continued in the Trondheimsfjord. Here, in a dramatic setting alongside quaint cottages and rural sheep farms, we began our search for rarely seen and photographed deepwater organisms.

Although the fjord appears relatively narrow, the sharp walls of the

surrounding landmass drop precipitously to the depths just a short distance from shore. It is here, in certain current-swept waters, that divers have the opportunity to encounter deepwater medusas, deep and coldwater corals and even the mysterious ghost sharks in depths attainable by divers.

Our first dive here started on a cold and rainy day. As we descended, however, the dreary surface weather receded from our minds, and we began our search for the big medusas.

Swimming along a silty, rocky bottom we passed over brittlestars, colourful coldwater anemones and various invertebrates before reaching a depth of about 27m.

Suddenly, like an apparition in the

Above: A diver prepares to explore a fjord.

Top left: Alien-looking deepwater Medusas emerge at night in the Trondheimsfjord.

Above left: Atlantic wolf-fish look fearsome but are harmless.

Below from left: Coldwater anemone; nudibranch; longspined anglerfish.

night, the deep red bulbous bell of a medusa, a full half-metre in diameter, appeared out of the dim edge of visibility. On closer inspection, we observed the strange tentacles and pulsating underbelly as the weird creature drifted by in the current.

Then, as our eyes quickly adjusted to the low light, we spotted another medusa – and another! We photographed a number of these fascinating creatures, of various sizes and all drifting languidly in the current from the unlit depths to destinations unknown.





SVEN GUST



they were mating. Perhaps they were exhibiting some other behaviour. Regardless of why, this dive was sure to add to the general knowledge base of these strange spectres of the deep!


Walking down a country lane after our final dive, the approach of winter was evident in the air.

The wind was blowing forcefully through the birch and evergreen trees and the howling rush of

by some distance, but that evening something new was observed. Here, way below the surface of the darkened fjord, we found a veritable shoal of ghost sharks.

About a dozen individuals were congregating in the same area of the fjord, and the reason for this gathering is really subject to speculation. Perhaps

cold air was a harbinger of tougher weather to come.

But as the residents of Norway were beginning to prepare for the long Arctic night, under water in the fjords and rivers life went on, marching to a timeless rhythm that is the same today as it was in the days of the Vikings. There is much to explore and discover still in these waters. This is the frontier. 

GHOST SHARKS, often referred to as chimeras, are deepwater cartilaginous fish related to sharks and rays. They are often found in waters as deep as 2.5km or more. Ranging in length from 65cm to 2m, they are characterised by large eyes, two dorsal fins and a long, tapering, slender tail.

There are 28 species worldwide, but the ones we sought in Norway are known to rise to diveable depths only in a few select areas of the fjords. They emerge at night, presumably in search of food, which consists of shellfish and small fish.

Because of the treacherous tidal movement in the fjord, our dive had to be timed to slack water after high tide – which meant that it was not until 11:30 on a rainy night that we hiked down a steep slope through the shoreline woods to the entry-point.

Once in the dark water, we began a 20-minute swim at 27m before we suddenly spotted a silvery flash in our lights. Local experience has established that ghost sharks tend to hunt alone, with divers encountering one at a time along the sandy slope of the fjord.

Individual sharks are often separated

Top: Ghost sharks are rarely seen by divers but in Norway there are chances to encounter them in 30m.

Above left: Diving on a wreck inside a fjord.

Above right: Christopher Weaver explores the kelp gardens.

Right: A diver treks to the river dive-site in search of migrating salmon.



FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▶ Most visitors fly into Oslo or Bergen. Domestic flights to Trondheim and other destinations bring divers closer to remote northern sites.

DIVING ▶ Northern Explorers can arrange specialised dive expeditions to the north of Norway, Svalbard and Greenland, www.northern-explorers.com

ACCOMMODATION ▶ This is typically in comfortable cabins located near dive-sites.

WHEN TO GO ▶ Because of the Gulf Stream, Norway enjoys a surprisingly temperate climate. The warmest temperatures are generally in July and August and the coldest December-March. Be prepared for sudden weather changes, however.

MONEY ▶ Norwegian kroner (NOK).

HEALTH ▶ Oslo has a recompression chamber.

PRICES ▶ The cost of the expedition described was 2450 euros pp, including all accommodation and diving and two meals a day. Return flights to Trondheim from London from £108.

VISITOR INFORMATION ▶ www.norway.com





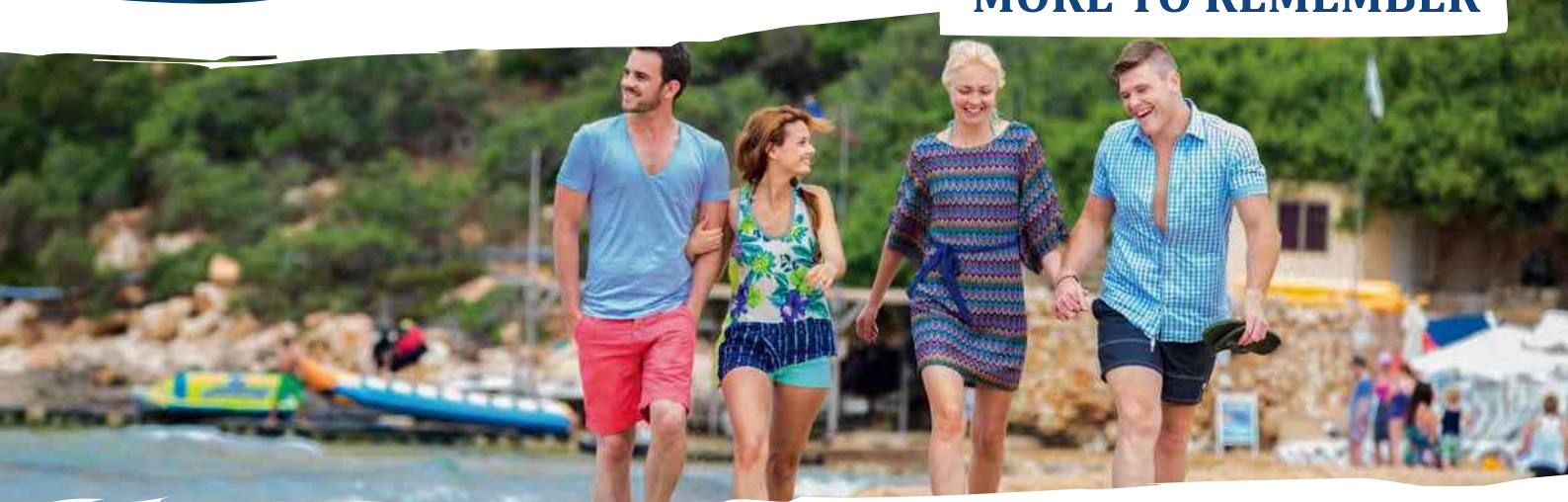
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Gold by Davide Lopresti.

REVEALED: UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR

UPY
LONDON

The British-based photo competition attracts even more entries in its second year out

THESE STUNNING IMAGES are the winners from the second year of the Underwater Photographer of the Year (UPY) competition. 2016 saw the number of entries rise from 2500 to 3500, as photographers from 54 different countries submitted their best images hoping to be the champ.

Three esteemed judges – Alex Mustard, Martin Edge and Peter Rowlands – had the pleasure of going through the entries to select the award winners. “It was astounding and humbling seeing the quality,” said Alex Mustard, chair of the judging panel and the driving force behind UPY.

“It’s a tough job distilling them down to the very best. Every single image that placed is an amazing moment from the underwater world. And many that nearly made the collection were almost as stunning. There has never been such strength in depth in underwater photography.”

“Selecting the winners is enjoyable, but also pressured,” went on Mustard. “Nobody’s work is judged as meticulously as the judges’! We take the

process very seriously, bringing all the judges together in one room, all looking at and discussing the images face to face over two days.

“Many competitions are judged online these days, with judges never meeting, and I think our old-school approach really strikes a chord with the entrants, who appreciate the effort we put into evaluating their images.

“I’m very happy judging with Peter and Martin. We all have different tastes, which leads to a diverse collection, but we’re united by insatiable enthusiasm for seeing underwater photos.”

The main award and the title of Underwater Photographer of the Year went to Italian photographer Davide Lopresti, for his artistic portrait of a spiny seahorse taken in Trieste, Italy.

His photo *Gold* aims to celebrate the return of seahorses to areas of the Mediterranean that have

been protected from destructive fisheries such as trawling. Artistically and technically impressive, Lopresti’s photo combines panning and a long exposure to create painterly textures in the seabed.

He then used a strobe restricted to make a spotlight to pick out the details of the seahorse. It is simply “beautiful and creative, a very worthy overall winner,” commented Mustard.

“Blue surrounds the entire four corners, which helps to keep the eye of the viewer firmly focused on the detail of the seahorse,” added judge Martin Edge. “The eye cannot escape the frame; it continues to rotate in circles.

“Complementary colours of blue and yellow are entirely responsible for the ‘wow factor’, which this image has from first viewing.”

The title of British Underwater Photographer of the Year was awarded to Dan Bolt from Devon for



Catshark Supernova, by Dan Bolt.



Fired Up and 'Almost Ready to Go!, by Marty Engels Dunmore.

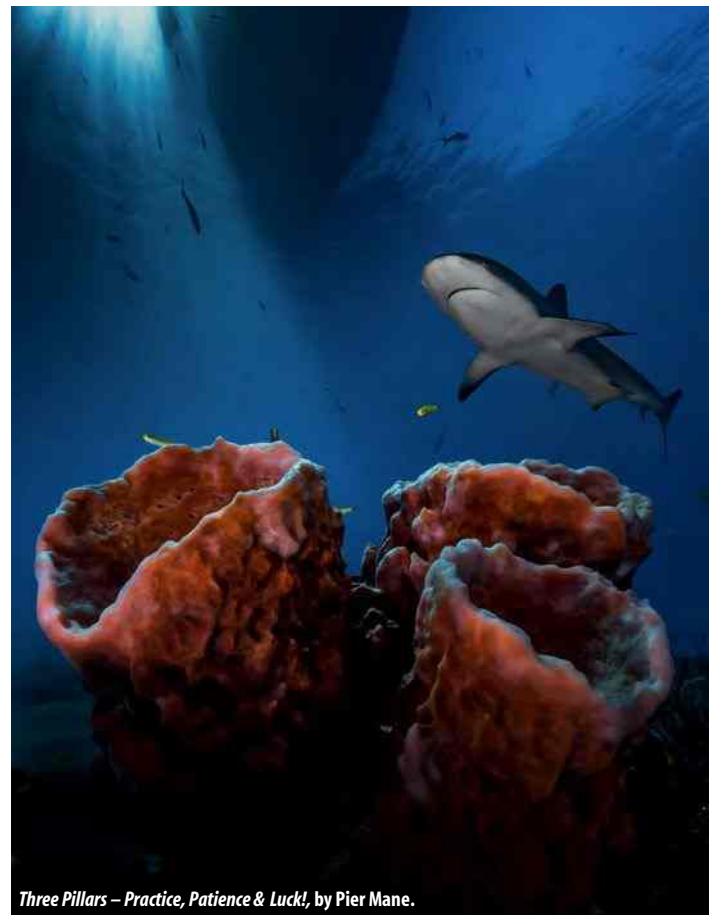
his photo *Catshark Supernova*. This award is open to all British residents and nationals wherever they are based in the world.

Bolt's winning picture was taken close to home in Thurlstone Bay. "The reef system there is a favoured laying ground for the smallspotted

Patience & Luck!, photographed in the Bahamas.

"Shark dives are exciting, but that makes them one of the hardest places to think as a photographer," commented Mustard.

"Pier deserves particular praise in producing such a powerful composition, when most of us



Three Pillars – Practice, Patience & Luck!, by Pier Mane.

catshark," said Bolt.

"The eggs are also known as mermaid's purses. I carefully positioned my strobe behind the egg to reveal its hidden beauty."

"This image grew on me over the judging days," said Edge. "Day one, it was all about the silhouette of the shark within the egg. By day two it was the balanced shape and ethereal light of the silhouette. Its masterstroke is to shape the backlighting in the form of wings. Outstanding."

UPY also aims to promote new talent. Pier Mane from South Africa was named Up & Coming Underwater Photographer of the Year for his image

Three Pillars – Practice,

would have lenses fixed only on the sharks."

The title of Most Promising British Underwater Photographer, 2016, was awarded to Marty Engels Dunmore from Suffolk for *Fired Up and 'Almost Ready to Go!*, taken on the *Kittiwake* wreck in Grand Cayman.

Preparation paid off for Engels Dunmore: "It isn't easy to produce a unique image of this well-loved wreck and I did a lot of research to see how others have photographed her. Deep inside I found this wonderful old machine, and placed my dive torch inside, as if the fire was still burning."

In addition to these four special awards, the competition was divided into 8 categories, testing photographers' skills in macro, wide angle, wrecks and behaviour. There were also categories just for photos taken in UK waters. The full results are given in the following pages.

The winners collect high-quality prizes from popular brands: Scuba Travel, Nauticam, Apeks, Fisheye and Fourth Element.

"I'm really excited to be presenting the images and the prizes on stage on Saturday at LIDS, where we'll also have a display of super-sized prints," added Mustard in the run-up to the London Dive Show.

"All three judges will be there and we're very happy to give our feedback on your entries. Just bring them along on an iPad or similar.

"Later that evening, the British Society of Underwater Photographers is organising a photographers' social meal, where British photographers will have the chance to make contacts and exchange ideas with the international visitors that the awards attract." 🐠

CATEGORY 1: INTERNATIONAL WIDE ANGLE For wide-angle underwater photos taken anywhere in the world



Winner: MIKE KOROSTELEV (Russia)

UNDERWATER FISHERMAN

Photographer's comments: "Cages are more commonly associated with photographing great white sharks, but I made a cage to keep me safe as I captured the fishing behaviour of the bear. I waited many hours in the cold water for the bear to come close enough to make my photo. The bear starts his fishing by sitting down, putting his head under the water and looking for fish. Once the fish start to ignore him and move closer he makes his crucial lunge to snare a large salmon in his paws, or teeth. He would usually stay under water for about 20 seconds. This bear came to this place in the river several times a day. Each time he caught about five fish and then went for a rest on the beach."

Technical: August 2015 at Kuril Lake, Kamchatka, Russia. Canon 5D Mark II, Canon 8-15 lens, Ikelite housing, ambient lighting. ISO 500, 1/800th @ f/7.1.

Judge's comments (Alex Mustard): "This unforgettable image is far more than an amazing portrait of a wild brown bear under water. It is a precisely timed behavioural portrait, capturing the peak of the action as the bear leaps for a meal and swishes his paw through the stones to snag his food. It's a great composition, taken in a split second in the frigid waters of Kamchatka."

Runner-Up: FABIO GALBIATI (Italy)

MANGROVE SUNSET

Photographer's comments:

"The first days bad weather prevented the boat from going out but we wanted to go into the water – why not take advantage of the pristine mangrove nearby? It was a big surprise, many subjects everywhere and the light effects produced by the sun and mangroves were very special. I decided to make a shot at sunset, and after a long search I found the right root with this nudibranch (*Jorunna funebris*) intent on feeding. After framing to restrict the backscatter I had only to wait for the sun to do its duty and... press the shutter!"

Technical: August 2015 at Coraleye research outpost, Bangka island, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. Olympus OMD-EM5 MK1, Panasonic 8mm f3.5 fisheye lens, Nauticam NA-EM5 housing & Nauticam 3.5 minidome port, dual Sea & Sea YS-D2 strobes. ISO 200, 1/80th @ f/8.

Judge's comments (Martin Edge): "An immediate winner for me, one of the best examples of wide-angle macro I've seen for some time. The perspective composition of all elements is so well thought out. Notice how the curve of Snell's Window wraps around the nudi, which emphasises the curve of 'Snell' at the bottom of the frame. The tree leads the eye through the surface and up towards the sky. We have golden tones of sunset towards the bottom which the author had the foresight to use to his advantage. The trees add their own depth to the image but in no way obstruct the perceived use of depth perspective from middle right of the frame, diagonally through Snell towards the colourful blue sky at top left. One of my favourites from the competition."



Third: GREG LECOEUR (France)

LAGOON

Photographer's comments: "French Polynesia is an amazing place for nature-lovers. In the lagoon of Moorea I was snorkelling with an abundance of marine life, most notably these blacktip sharks. The topography of the mountains in the background inspired me to realise this half-and-half photo."

Technical: September 2015 in Moorea, French Polynesia. Nikon D7200, Tokina 10-17mm lens, Nauticam NA-D7200 housing, two Ikelite DS160 strobes. ISO 100, 1/250th @ f/13.

Judge's comments (Peter Rowlands): "If ever there was an image that captured 'excitement' it is this perfect combination of frozen movement, split-level scene-setting and great composition. The reflected surface lighting on the sharks and the sand lifts it to another level."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Gabriel Barathieu (Green Turtle with Remora), Greg Lecouer (Pilot Whales), Davide Lopresti (Swim), Alejandro Prieto (Beach Guardians). **COMMENDED:** Mathieu Foulquié (Seven), Damien Mauric (Blue Ballet), Tobias Friedrich (Icebreaker).

CATEGORY 2: INTERNATIONAL MACRO For macro and close-up underwater photos taken anywhere in the world

Winner & Underwater Photographer of the Year: DAVIDE LOPRESTI (Italy)

GOLD



Photographer's comments: "Over the years seahorses have been drastically reduced in the Mediterranean sea, and only recently has there been a significant restocking thanks to a public awareness campaign. Areas of the sea have now been preserved, off-limits for fishing, and vulnerable and delicate creatures such as seahorses have returned. For this shot, I used a long exposure time to give dynamism to the image, combining the ambient light and artificial light with the aid of a snoot, freezing my main subject from the rest of the scene and giving a sense of grace and strength at the same time."

Technical: August 2015 at Sistiana, Trieste in Italy. Nikon D600, 105 macro Nikkor 2.8 vr lens, Nimar housing, Inon Z240 strobe with Retra snoot. ISO 200, 1/8th @ f/18.

Judge's comments (Martin Edge): "Another of my favourites from the competition. I see many motion-blur images but this one has been shot to perfection. A simple composition with a balanced amputation of muted colour at bottom right of the frame. Blue surrounds the entire four corners, which helps to keep the eye of the viewer firmly focused on the detail of the seahorse. The eye cannot escape the frame, it continues to rotate in circles. Complementary colours of blue and yellow are entirely responsible for the 'wow factor' which this image had on me when I first viewed it."

Runner-Up: HELEN BRIERLEY (USA)

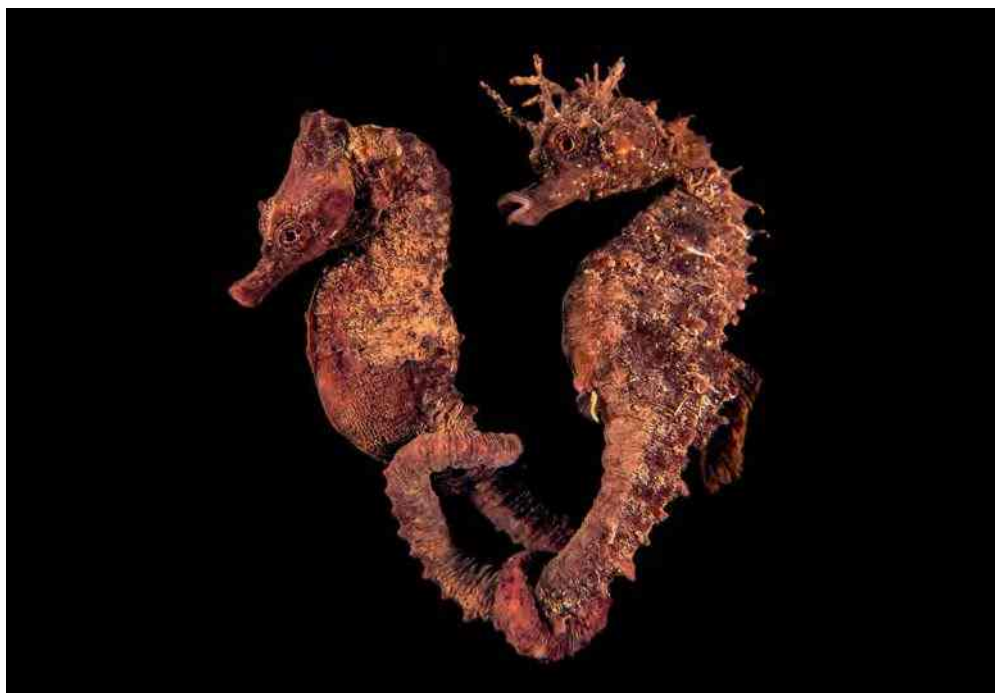
PELAGIC OCTOPUS AT NIGHT



Photographer's comments: "Suspended in the inky blackness of the open ocean where the water is thousands of feet deep, a myriad of weird and wonderful creatures came into view in the narrow-focus light beam. They were making their nightly journey towards the surface to feed, before heading back down to the depths in time to escape the light of another day. Using our lights to help locate their prey, we were truly in another world, and we didn't want ever to leave. I was able to take several shots of this tiny octopus as it drifted by, but it disappeared again into the darkness all too soon."

Technical: November 2014 off Kona, Hawaii. Nikon D800, Sigma 70mm lens, Nauticam housing, dual Sea & Sea YS-D1 strobes. ISO 320, 1/125th @ f/11.

Judge's comments (Alex Mustard): "Helen definitely took on one of macro photography's big challenges to produce this eye-catching image. It's not easy to shoot macro portraits of tiny, semi-transparent critters while suspended in the darkness of inner space – an open-ocean blackwater dive. Capturing such a pleasing composition of an attractive species in these conditions is a great achievement."



Third: GIANNI COLUCCI (Italy)

THE ODD COUPLE

Photographer's comments: "On a night-dive at around midnight with a full moon, I found this pair of seahorses (*Hippocampus guttulatus*), which swam in the shallows holding each other by the tail. The scene that I photographed was majestic, a magic only enhanced by the beauty of the site and the evening's full moon."

Technical: September 2015 at Taranto, Ionian Sea, Italy. Nikon D700, Nikkor 60 mm Micro lens, Nauticam housing, Inon Z240 strobe. ISO 100. 1/320th @ f/22.

Judge's comments (Peter Rowlands): "Individual seahorses have a mythical visual appeal. Cute, vulnerable and delicate, they have grace and weirdness in equal measures. Capture two entwined, simply lit on a beautifully black, eye-concentrating background, and you have a shot that went straight to the winners' enclosure."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Behnaz Afsahi (Timeless Moment!), Qing Lin (Lace Model), Greg Lecoeur (Black Water), Adriano Moretton (Lightning). **COMMENDED:** Marc Casanovas (Happiness), Ross Gudgeon (Goby on a Sea Pen), Matteo Visconti (Harlequin Spotlight).

CATEGORY 3: INTERNATIONAL WRECKS For wide-angle and macro photos taken on wrecks (which can be the main subject or the setting)



Winner: THOMAS HECKMANN (Germany)

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Photographer's comments: "I was unable to descend because I had to take care of Maja, my five-year-old daughter, who can't snorkel by herself. The only possibility was a shot from the surface under these circumstances. It was too rough for a normal over/under shot. I decided to try a wave & wreck shot with the island of Curaçao in the background. I needed several tries to compose wreck, wave and island in one shot but in the end I got a real over/under shot with a total other view of the famous wreck."

Technical: September 2014 at Tugboat site in Curaçao. Nikon D800E, Sigma fisheye 15 mm/2.8 lens, Seacam Silver D800 housing, ambient lighting. ISO 400, 1/160th @ f/16.

Judge's comments (Peter Rowlands): "Shots like this don't just happen. They're the result of planning peppered with good luck. To achieve it while snorkelling is very impressive, and the choice of the curved split level rather than the traditional horizontal creates a very dynamic image that leaves the viewer in no doubt. Winning images must have everything right and then an ace up their sleeve to make them rise above the competition. This, to my mind, is a perfect example."

Runner-Up: ANDERS NYBERG (Sweden)

TRUCK PARKING

Photographer's comments: "I can't get enough of the beautiful *Thistlegorm*. What makes the wreck unique is the great opportunity to create stunning images, especially if you add one or more off-camera strobes to create more depth. For lighting, my buddy and I placed the three off-camera strobes, one in each truck and a torch in the engine compartment in the first truck. I can easily spend the entire dive inside the wreck. What's important to remember is to move carefully when placing the off-camera strobes so that you don't silt up the area and ruin the image."

Technical: July 2015, *Thistlegorm*, Egypt, Red Sea. Nikon D800, Tokina 10-17mm at 17mm lens, Hugafof D800 housing, Inon Z240 and three Inon and Ikelite off-camera strobes. ISO 320, 1/25th @ f/10.

Judge's comments (Alex Mustard): "This picture sparked an interesting debate in the judging room: can a photographer show off too much in a competition?! These Ford trucks inside the *Thistlegorm* wreck are in almost total darkness in 25m of water. This is not an easy place to produce an image that uses four separate off-camera light sources. More importantly, Anders has produced a striking and well-crafted composition with the row of repeating windows, the sprinkling of fish and the blue opening in the background providing depth and a feeling of place."



Third: STEVE JONES (UK)

BEAUFIGHTER

Photographer's comments: "This is the wreck of an RAF Beaufighter, a heavily armed attack aircraft used extensively in WW2. The wreckage lies upside-down on bright white sand at 38m. I wanted an image of the whole wreck that was different from what I'd seen before, and as my buddy moved near the undercarriage I realised that the best angle was from directly above. Using rebreathers made the task much easier, as I didn't have to worry about any annoying bubbles!"

Technical: June 2015 near St Julians, Malta. Nikon D4, Nikon RS R-UW Fisheye 13mm F2.8 lens (Seacam conversion), Seacam D4 housing, ambient lighting. ISO 320, 1/100th @ F/11.

Judge's comments (Peter Rowlands): "It's easy when you see an



image like this to think it was a great way to produce a fresh and different image of an often photographed wreck, but it's your job as an underwater photographer to come up with that angle before anyone else does, and that's what will make you and your underwater photography stand out in competitions. Steve did just that and has produced a fresh and appealing image. Never underestimate the effect that the corners of a frame can have. The lighter blue frame edges really lift this image and give it great depth. The diver adds scale and interest without detracting from the main focal point."

HIGHLY COMMENDED:

Anders Nyberg (Need to Change a Tyre), Saeed Rashid (The Tank), Christian Vizl (USS Kittiwake & Diver), Spencer Burrows (Exploring the Podsnap). **COMMENDED:** Rui Guerra (The Steering Wheel), Trevor Rees (Rozi Tugboat), Susannah H Snowden-Smith (Kittiwake Shipwreck).

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CATEGORY 4: INTERNATIONAL BEHAVIOUR For underwater photos of natural marine-life behaviour, taken anywhere in the world



Winner: RICHARD CAREY (Thailand)

TURTLE EATING JELLYFISH

Photographer's comments: After an early-morning dive we stopped in a bay for breakfast. A green turtle (*Chelonia mydas*) surfaced near our boat. I snorkelled with it, watching it search for food. It spotted a large mosaic jellyfish (*Thysanostoma thysanura*) a couple of metres below the surface, swam over to it, dived and started feeding on it. The turtle obviously wanted to keep the jelly near the surface, so every time it swam deeper it would bite onto it and drag it back upwards. I spent a few minutes watching and taking photos, then left the turtle to finish its meal in peace."

Technical: November 2015 at the Similan Islands, Thailand. Canon Eos 60D, Tokina 10-17 len, Seacam Prelude 60D housing, two 2 x Ikelite DS 160 strobes. ISO 400, 1/200th @ f/10

Judge's comments (Peter Rowlands): "Such a good example of what you can make of a chance encounter. It would have been so easy to have finished breakfast and missed this shot! It captures so much, and with the background story it's the pinnacle of a visual experience that must have been fascinating to watch, and even more satisfying to capture with a moment in time. Simply beautiful, too."

Runner-Up: ALEJANDRO PRIETO (Mexico)

WHAT FEEDS BENEATH

Photographer's comments: "I entered the cold November water to photograph a pair of humpback whales that passed on very quickly. Swimming back to the boat I saw a small moving object ahead – a Hawaiian petrel submerging its head to feed on tiny crustaceans. Normally as you get close it will fly away, but surprisingly it just kept feeding in front of me. By approaching very slowly I was able to get close from beneath, and thankfully it stayed for a few moments, allowing me to capture its behaviour. The Hawaiian petrel is classified as endangered by the IUCN."

Technical: November 2014 at Todos Santos, Mexico. Canon 5D Mk II, Sigma 15mm fisheye lens, Subal CD5DII housing, Sea & Sea strobes. ISO 200, 1/160th @ f/13.

Judge's comments (Martin Edge): "It's common for seabirds to join in with the bait-balls, and on this occasion a beautiful portrait was created by the author. The bright tones within Snell's Window give an ethereal look to this petrel submerging to feed. The dark tones outside Snell frame the composition and keep the eye of the viewer within the frame. The result is a beautiful image."



Third: RUI GUERRA (Portugal)

MILLIONS OF CRABS

Photographer's comments: "Every year, millions of crabs (*Polydora henslowii*) form large red masses in places along the coast of Portugal. This high density of swimming crabs is somewhat rare to see, and although we saw some dispersed crabs, it took us almost an hour to spot a higher concentration. It was only after another 20 minutes of bluewater diving that I noticed an immense 'red cloud' made up of maybe several thousand crabs swimming through the water."

Technical: July 2015 at Berlengas Natural Reserve, Portugal. Nikon D800, Sigma 15mm f2.8 fisheye lens, Subal ND800 housing, two Inon Z240 strobes. ISO 320, 1/250th @ f/14.

Judge's comments (Alex Mustard): "This is a jaw-dropping scene that just gets better and better the bigger you see it and the longer you look. The behaviour is fascinating, but the photography is even better. Rui's sensitive use of light and the satisfying composition transports the viewer to the heart of this natural phenomenon. I love the depth of the aggregation, with the crabs disappearing into the blue, seemingly going on forever."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Theresa A Guise (Crunch), Paolo Bausani (Cleaners), Vania Kam (All-You-Can-Eat Eggs Buffet); Damien McGuirk (Hunting Long Nosed Hawkfish).
COMMENDED: Ralph Pace (Battle at the Nine), Richard Barnden (Life Begins – Bumphead Parrotfish Spawning), Susannah H Snowden-Smith (Torrent).

CATEGORY 5: UP AND COMING WORLDWIDE

For any type of underwater photos taken by unpublished photographers who have yet to win a major award for their images. Photos can be taken anywhere in the world.

Winner & Up & Coming Underwater Photographer of the Year: PIER MANE (South Africa)

THREE PILLARS - PRACTICE, PATIENCE & LUCK!

Photographer's comments: "Weary of shooting sharks head-on, and keen to avoid diver's bubbles in my shot, I decided to turn away from the peak action and the crowds it attracts."



I wanted sun rays, dramatic foreground, background perspective, and – the cherry on top – to capture the 'master of the house' in all of its mystique. The three sponges were well-positioned to set the scene beneath the boat and it took countless shots to balance the elements I wanted; but perseverance, patience and practice all paid off. I would like to dedicate my first winning shot to my father, for his introduction to photography, and to my mother for passing on her resilient attitude."

Technical: September 2015 at Tiger Beach, Bahamas. Olympus EM-1 Micro 4/3 Mirrorless, M Zuiko Digital ED 9-18mm f4.0-5.6 @ 9mm lens, Nauticam NA-EM1 housing, two Sea & Sea YSD1 strobes. ISO 400, 1/250th @ f/9.

Judge's comments (Martin Edge): "Throughout the judging process, this image grew and grew on me. It got better every time I viewed it, to the point that I was looking forward to seeing it again in the next round. While the shark is perfectly composed within the frame I have a gut feeling that the author framed the boat and three sponges together with the light shafts at top left. This was the backdrop, the stage, and it was just a matter of patience and position for the shark placement. The composition in this image is so balanced that it looks easy to simply press the shutter every time it swam into that particular space. Imagine it as a manta, turtle or hammerhead. All would have worked well. The underbelly of the shark could so easily have proved difficult with the flash illumination but the subtle tones and circles of the near-view sponges bring it all together."



Runner-Up & Most Promising British Underwater Photographer of the Year: MARTY ENGELS DUNMORE (UK)

FIRED UP AND 'ALMOST' READY TO GO

Photographer's comments: "Today it isn't easy to produce a unique image of the well-loved wreck the *Kittiwake*, and I did a lot of research before I dived to see how others had photographed her before me. In 18m of water I found this wonderful old machine – in fact there are two of these engines, positioned opposite to each other. The image is produced without any strobes, but with the aid of my dive-torch, which I positioned within the engine to give me an extra focal point."

Technical: May 2015 on the USS *Kittiwake*, Grand Cayman. Nikon D4s, Nikon 16mm lens, Nauticam housing, natural light and torch. ISO 5000, 1/20th @ f/9.

Judge's comments (Peter Rowlands): "It takes a lot to impress an old wreck photographer like me but here is a quite superb example of how, with a comparatively simple touch, a straightforward technical shot has been so effectively elevated to the eye. But such a simple addition of the furnace lighting is not enough on its own. The composition, use of mixed light and graphic simplicity all contribute to a very powerful and successful image."

Third: SPENCER BURROWS (UK)

THE EYE OF A BUTTERFLY

Photographer's comments: "While masked butterflyfish are fairly common in the Red Sea, they are quite skittish and often swim away on approach. As I wanted to try to capture this common fish in a different way, I had an abstract shot in mind and I felt the eye with its blue and yellow surroundings were key to the shot working. Having failed to get this to work with a standard macro lens, I equipped a tele-converter for additional reach, which allowed me to keep my distance from the fish."

Technical: September 2015 at Sharks Bay house reef, Egypt. Nikon D800, Nikon 105mm VR + Kenko 1.4 TC lens, Nauticam housing, two Sea and Sea YSD1 strobes. ISO 125, 1/125th @ f/11.

Judge's comments (Alex Mustard): "Every photographer who has dived in the Red Sea will have photographed masked butterflyfish. However, none of the judging panel had ever seen this powerful composition before, captured by Spencer's original photographic vision. Perhaps the sincerest compliments he will receive about its strength is that it is sure to be regularly replicated. Remember, you saw it here first!"



HIGHLY COMMENDED: Pier Mane (The Great Sea Eagle), Marty Engels Dunmore (Caribbean Reef Sharks), Ferenc Lorincz (Transparent Trick), Oliver Anlauf (Bass). **COMMENDED:** Fabio Russo (White-Spotted Fighter), Pier Mane (The Majestic Purple Dame), Spencer Burrows (Lighting the Cockpit).

CATEGORY 6: BRITISH WATERS WIDE ANGLE For wide-angle photos taken in British seas and fresh water (not including pools, aquariums etc)

Winner: MARCUS BLATCHFORD (UK)

PART OF THE ILLUSION

Photographer's comments: "The National Diving & Activity Centre is the deepest inland dive-centre in the UK. The day the photo was taken, the dive plan was to bumble around the deep end, a dive we had done many times before, but this time I dived 'unplugged' and using no artificial light. With the exception of a variation of camera technique, there were no planned shots my buddy or I wanted to achieve – just a fun dive with *ad hoc* photos along the way. Shortly after this photo was captured, in 6° water and with two hours of decompression ahead of us, we turned and started the long ascent back to the surface."

Technical: May 2015 at the NDAC, Chepstow. Canon EOS 5d Mk III, Canon EF 8-15mm f/4L fisheye USM lens, Hugyfot HFC-5D MKIII housing, ambient light. ISO 12800, 1/60th @ f/4.

Judge's comments (Peter Rowlands): "While this may have been an 'unplanned' photo dive, these two, the model and the photographer, knew exactly what they were doing, either by instinct or design. Graphic simplicity and beautiful composition are the trademark starting points for a winning shot. Add that special light that depth produces and you have a captivating result. Shooting at such a depth 'unplugged' without artificial light has introduced some image noise but, as far as I'm concerned, this only adds to the mood. A well-deserved winner."



Third: TREVOR REES (UK)

ELAN VALLEY TROUT IN WINTER



Photographer's comments: "This is a half-and-half scene taken on a snowy January morning. I have used my fisheye lens behind a large dome port for ease of creating the split image. The depth of the water is no more than 30cm and the brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) has been subsequently added to the scene in Photoshop, so this is very much a composite image. The trout was actually shot at a different time and location. The inspiration may be from images I have seen of migrating salmon struggling up

a river to then be found lying exhausted in the shallows – a poor substitute, I know, but I like the effect."

Technical: January 2013 at Elan Valley, Powys, Wales. Nikon D90, Nikkor 10.5mm lens, Sea & Sea DX-D80 housing, dual Sea & Sea YS110 strobes. ISO 200, 1/200th @ f/20.

Judge's comments (Martin Edge): "The layers of interest and depth perspective in this image grab the eye of the viewer instantly. Firstly, the angle of the trout and pattern of ice above. The reeds continue the pattern of viewing all the way to the hills in the distance, blue sky and fluffy white clouds. It's got it all."

Runner-Up: WILL CLARK (UK)

SHOCKED SHARK

Photographer's comments: "This juvenile blue shark was the first to arrive at our boat after an hour of chumming. We were alerted to its presence by the bobbing of a small buoy that had fresh mackerel tied to it. I leaned over the side with my housing not quite fully submerged as the skipper tried to coax the shark nearer. He got the blue very close to me, and at the last moment whipped the bait out of the water, which got a reaction from this little shark."

Technical: August 2015, a few miles south of Penzance, Cornwall.

Canon EOS 7D Mk II, Canon EF 8-15mm f/4L fisheye USM lens, two Inon Z240 strobes, Nauticam housing. ISO 400, 1/160th @ f/13.

Judge's comments (Alex Mustard): "A couple of years ago, even a grainy, soft image of a blue shark in British waters would have caused jaws to drop, but standard portraits are now consigned to the 'seen it before' folder in competition terms. Will's perfectly timed portrait rises far above this as a fresh take on this subject. It is full of energy and reveals much of the character of this enigmatic shark."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Nick Blake (Set the Ray to Jelly), Richard Shucksmith (Inquisitive Flatfishes), Matt Doggett (Tadpole Shoal), Steve Jones (Discovery).
COMMENDED: Trevor Rees (Pike in Quarry), Will Clark (Blue Blur), Dan Bolt (Early Morning Plumose Anemones)

CATEGORY 7: BRITISH WATERS MACRO For macro and close-up photos taken in British seas and fresh water (not including pools, aquariums etc)

Winner & British Underwater Photographer of the Year: DAN BOLT

CATSHARK SUPERNOVA



Photographer's comments: "Just off a headland in this beautiful bay is a reef system favoured as a laying ground for the eggs, or 'mermaids purse', of the smallspotted catshark (*Scyliorhinus canicula*). The day I chose to visit the reef for a snorkel I came across many egg-cases wrapped tightly into the weed. Positioning my strobe carefully took some time, but the resulting image, with the low visibility providing a celestial-like quality, shows the hidden beauty within this system of reproduction."

Technical: December 2014 at Thurlstone, Devon. Olympus E-PL5, Olympus 9-18mm lens, Olympus PT-EP10 housing, Sea & Sea YS-D1 & Snoot. ISO 200, 1/250th @ f/10.

Judge's comments (Martin Edge): "This particular image grew on me over the judging days, and with the last category to resolve it got better and better. Day one, it was all about the silhouette of the catshark within the egg-case. By day two it was the balanced shape and ethereal light of the silhouette. It was a masterstroke to shape the backlighting with a snooted strobe in the form of wings. Outstanding simplicity."

Third: CATHY LEWIS (UK)

SAFE HAVEN

Photographer's comments: "It was our first dive of the season, on the *Scylla* wreck in Whitsand Bay. The water was thick with plankton and a strong current was funnelling small compass jellyfish towards the starboard side of the wreck. Some of the jellyfish were host to a large number of juvenile codfish, possibly whiting, which use them for protection. The larger fry were perched on top while the smaller ones swam among the tentacles, somehow avoiding being stung. Photographing the highly reflective silver fry was a frustrating challenge, but I have never seen so many fish crammed into such small jellies, so I knew that I was witnessing something rather special."

Technical: May 2015 on the *Scylla*, Plymouth. Nikon D7000, 60mm lens, Nauticam housing, Sea & Sea YS110 strobe. ISO 160, 1/80th @ f/16

Judge's comments (Peter Rowlands): "I know this wreck well and am far too familiar with the conditions described so I'm really impressed with the photographic skills pulled out to capture such a clean image. As if conditions weren't difficult enough, the lighting and exposure are spot on and the composition is dynamic without taking the eye away from the subject matter. Once settled, the eye looks around and discovers the smaller fry seeking shelter. Altogether a most captivating image."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Mark Thomas (Shanny), Alex Tattersall (Nudibranch), Richard Shucksmith (Angel), Trevor Rees (Skeleton Shrimp). **COMMENDED:** Cathy Lewis (Intruder Beware), Saeed Rashid (Inquisitive Cuckoo Wrasse), Dan Bolt (Friend or Foe?)

Runner-Up: GEORGE STOYLE (UK)

PLANKTONIC PREDATOR



Photographer's comments: "In the summer of 2015 Scottish Natural Heritage asked dive teams to conduct site-monitoring of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), including North Rona. We had come to the end of a dive inside a cave, and just before we reached the surface we noticed an unusual amount of zooplankton that had become trapped inside the cave entrance. We then spotted a couple of tiny, post-larval monkfish feeding on the plankton, something none of us had ever seen. Getting an in-focus shot with my macro lens was easier said than done with the prevailing swell, but I managed a few before the boat came to pick us up."

Technical: August 2015 at North Rona. Nikon D700, 105mm macro lens, Nauticam housing, two Inon Z240 strobes. ISO 400, 1/160th @ f/10.

Judge's comments (Alex Mustard): "This is the most remarkable-looking creature I have ever seen photographed in British waters. This juvenile monkfish doesn't even look as if it comes from our planet, let alone our shores. An amazing subject photographed flawlessly, it is definitely one of the most memorable pictures in this year's collection."



CATEGORY 8: BRITISH WATERS COMPACT For any underwater photos taken in British seas and fresh water (not including pools, aquariums etc) with compact cameras.



Winner: PAUL COLLEY (UK)

HELLO DUCKY!

Photographer's comments: "While trying to photograph trout during a year-long river project with a home-made pole-cam, a raft of mallard ducks muscled in to steal food intended to entice trout to the camera. This initial nuisance became an interesting opportunity and, shooting blind with the camera on the pole, I managed to catch the trout below water with a duck swimming overhead. Snell's Window was an important predetermined part of the composition. This needed a low viewpoint, an upward camera angle and a metric tonne of patience to allow all the elements to come together and make the picture work."

Technical: September 2015 on the River Test, Hampshire. Olympus XZ-2, INON UWL 100 wet lens, Olympus PT-054 housing, natural light. ISO 320, 1/320th @ f/6.3.

Judge's comments (Alex Mustard): "River fish are notoriously shy and difficult to photograph, which makes Paul's image all the more remarkable. Not only is it a handsome photograph of a brown trout but the perfectly framed female mallard is an exceptional secondary subject. This compact camera picture took dogged determination, a custom-built pole-cam and outstanding photographic vision to conceive such original images."

Runner-Up: TREVOR REES (UK)

TOMPOT LOOKING OUT

Photographer's comments: "Who doesn't love the look of these charismatic fish? This tompot blenny (*Parablennius gattorugine*) was found hiding in a hole among the legs of a sea pier. Some of these fish are quite shy, while others are rather inquisitive and like to see what's going on. This one was happy to pose for as long as I needed, although it did disappear for a few minutes every so often

before popping out again. I made sure that I had both the fish's eyes facing forward in the same direction and that the head tentacles were isolated against a black background. As tompot blennies are very popular and very well photographed fish, I opted for an off-centre composition with quite a lot of negative space to perhaps give a slightly different feel to my take on this fish."

Technical:

July 2015 at Trefor Pier, Llyn Peninsula, North Wales. Olympus TG-3, Olympus PT-056 housing, Sea & Sea YS110 strobe. ISO 200, 1/200th @ f/6.3.

Judge's comments (Martin Edge): "This image has all the technique for an excellent fish portrait. As the author points out, the eyes do need to be symmetrical."



Third: TREVOR REES (UK)

BRITISH NATIVE CRAYFISH



Photographer's comments:

"The British native crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) is a species now under threat as it struggles to compete against the larger American signal crayfish. The crayfish at this freshwater quarry are all native ones and there are a good number to be seen. I found the small form factor of a compact camera ideal for holding at arm's length to get a low angle and to get close to an individual that was nicely out in the open. The auto-exposure-only nature of my camera was restricting but I was pleased to get a light green water background and be able to add a little strobe light to bring out the colour of the crustacean."

Technical: October 2015 at Stoney Cove, Leicestershire. Olympus TG-3, Olympus PT-056 housing, Sea & Sea YS110 strobe. ISO 200, 1/60th @ f/3.2.

Judge's comments (Peter Rowlands):

"It has long been an irritation of mine that so many UK macro shots have black or murky backgrounds. Such shots have single-handedly tainted UK diving with a negative impression, yet the truth can be so different, as this excellent shot illustrates. Balancing ambient and artificial light is a technical start. Then add a great composition, a powerful upward angle and a sublime emerald-green background combine to produce a celebratory 'British' shot."

HIGHLY COMMENDED: Trevor Rees (Lobster) & (Pike on the Move), Sara Bowring (Pink Fins Taste Much Better) & (Hello, Give Us a Kiss). **COMMENDED:** Nic Faulks (Scilly Seal!), Sara Bowring (Night Time Stroll) & (Lazy Day In The Sun).

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CONFIGURATION & THE

AN IMPORTANT STEP towards becoming a better diver is to acquire the habit of constantly reviewing the way in which your equipment is set up. As I mentioned in the last article in this series, in the technical-diving community this process is known as configuration.

Technical divers constantly evaluate and re-evaluate the purpose of the equipment they carry with them under water, and the way they put it all together.

If you have been diving for some time and your equipment is currently set up exactly as it was when you learned to dive, a review may be well overdue.

THE BASICS

No two divers have exactly the same requirements or preferences, but good configurations do share a number of basic attributes. Here is a guide to getting started.

Your first aim is to make sure that you look good: not when you stand admiring yourself in front of your bedroom mirror, but when you're in your dive gear and under water.

Your profile should be clean and streamlined. When you're horizontal, nothing should be hanging down below you, so clip off hoses and tape down or tuck away securely any loose straps.

This is not simply for aesthetic reasons. It helps prevent you getting caught up on a reef or wreck and thus damaging yourself, your equipment or the environment; or all three simultaneously.

Furthermore, the less interruption there is to the smooth flow of water over your body, the more efficiently you will be able to swim, allowing you to conserve both air and energy.

ACCESSORIES

These are the same reasons why each accessory you carry should be stowed away rather than just left to dangle down from your BC.

Everything must be secured so that it stays in place and is there when you need it, but not hidden away so well that it is difficult to find and deploy.

There are a couple of crucial rules to follow. If you use pockets, put only one loose thing in each because if you have several items loose in the same pocket and pull one out, everything else will come out with it.



Above: Clean and streamlined.

Pockets with clips inside are a good idea. If you are attaching things to D-rings, ensure that each piece of equipment is secured at two points so that it doesn't fall off and disappear into the depths if one attachment point fails.

Think carefully about what equipment you really need to take with you on any particular dive. Look critically at each item, examine its purpose and consider its usefulness.

The mere fact that you own something is not sufficient justification for carrying it on every dive.

However, if a piece of gear is so important that its failure or loss would threaten your safety, make sure that you have two of them. An obvious example is torches on a night dive.

Be wary of taking this concept too far. Carrying back-ups for non-essential equipment can over-burden you.

If you're sure that you don't need something, leave it behind.

This decision is not always straightforward. For example: you wouldn't usually take a snorkel with you when diving in an overhead environment, but if the dive was on a wreck and involved a long surface swim out from the shore and back, then yes, it would be a good idea to take a snorkel, and keep every breath of your air supply for the dive itself.

You wouldn't keep the snorkel attached to the side of your mask during the dive, as it would represent a potential entanglement hazard if you encountered any line or dangling cables, but you could tuck it away in your BC when it's not in use (there are folding snorkels specifically designed for this purpose), or strap it to your harness.

QUEST FOR PERFECTION



In his sixth article in this series, **SIMON PRIDMORE** asks if your dive gear is

set up as well as it could be, and suggests some techniques you could adopt to improve it. Photos by **ANDREY BIZYUKIN**

HOSES

Give a good deal of thought especially to the length and placement of your regulator hoses. A key point to note here is that there are no standard hose lengths, although it may be convenient for manufacturers and retailers to pretend that there are.

Regulators and submersible pressure gauges are mostly packaged with hoses, but one size does not fit all.

Don't just accept unquestioningly the hoses that are in the box or on the display model. Large people need longer hoses than small people and different configuration options require different hose lengths. Good dive-centres understand this and will help.

Even if you find that you have to buy extra hoses, it's well worth the expense to get it right. There is no need to discard the packaged hoses, however. Your configuration might evolve and you could need them one day.

Be aware that, as well as intermediate-pressure regulator hoses and high-pressure hoses, various lengths of corrugated inflator hose and low-pressure inflator hose are available too.

A discussion of the pros and cons of various regulator set-ups deserves an article of its own, and I will return to the topic later in this series.

Below: Loose straps tucked away.

AN OPEN MIND IS THE BEST ACCESSORY

You will notice that this article does not preach the benefits of any particular configuration. As I said earlier, no two people are exactly the same. So, while it is an excellent idea to look at how other people configure their equipment, beware of blindly copying your diving heroes, or succumbing to peer pressure to conform to other divers' preferences.

Have confidence in your own solutions. If something works well for you, then that is all that really matters.

When choosing your own path, however, by all means be inventive but avoid the temptation to get carried away and look for complex solutions. Keep everything as simple as possible.

Even when you feel you have arrived at a configuration with which you are pleased, maintain an open mind.

Always be prepared to adapt your style if you see something you think might work better.

If you are part of a team, your configuration should ideally be compatible with that of the people with whom you dive.

This doesn't mean that all of you need to carry exactly the same make and model of equipment but the thinking behind the way each diver's gear is set up should be similar.

The whole team needs to have confidence in each member's system.

GOING THROUGH CHANGES

Configuration is a process of evolution rather than revolution. Make changes one at a time, and give yourself time to get used to each change before making the next. Don't embark on a testing dive before doing a few dives in relatively benign conditions to get used to the changes first.

Keep only the changes with which you are completely happy. If anything feels awkward or uncomfortable, don't persist with it. It's surprising how easily a minor irritation can nag away at your subconscious during a dive and raise your stress levels.

Ask a friend with a camera to record how you look as your configuration evolves. We all have a picture in our minds of how we look under water, but the reality may not live up to that



image. Seeing incontrovertible evidence before your eyes may offer you a powerful incentive to improve.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Reflecting carefully about how you put your equipment together makes you both a safer diver and a better team-player.

Just the simple fact that you have given thought to how to store or where to place every piece of equipment you carry will enable you to deploy it more efficiently in an emergency.

Of course, a key part of the process is that once you've decided where something should go, you then have to practise both deploying it *and* replacing it. There is no point in tucking something away tidily if you then can't reach it on a dive.

It's also awkward if, having deployed a piece of equipment, you then have to



Above: There are no standard hose lengths.


hold it in your hand for the rest of the dive, even though you no longer need it, simply because you can't put it back or stow it somewhere else.

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

To summarise: your set-up needs to be comfortable, streamlined and uncluttered as possible. Everything must be secured or stored out of the way when

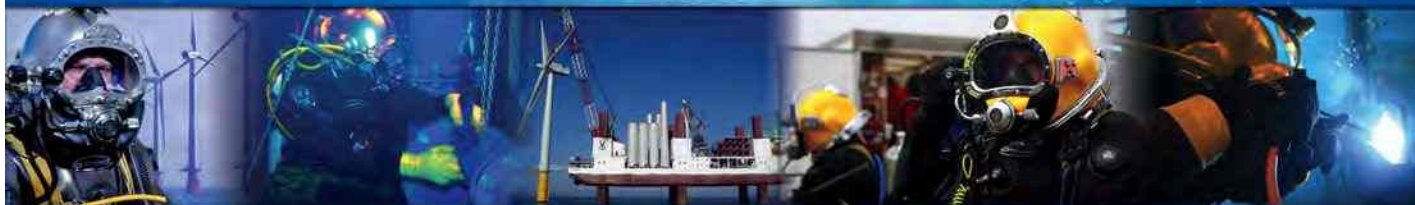
not in use, yet be easily and quickly accessible when required.

You must carry everything you do need and nothing that you don't. Finally, your configuration should be both individual and compatible with the other members of your dive-team.

All this may sound like an impossible mission but the goal is well worth pursuing. Think of it as a never-ending quest for perfection. 

Read more from Simon Pridmore in *Scuba Confidential – An Insider's Guide to Becoming a Better Diver* and *Scuba Professional – Insights into Sport Diver Training & Operations*, both available on Amazon in a variety of formats

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BALKAN



As so often the weather gods play a part when a Croatian wreck-diving itinerary is at stake, but **RICK AYRTON** gets a good crack at the wrecks of Istria, including some British iron and steel



Pictured: Deck gun on the stern section of the *Cesare Rossari*.

Right: Divers exploring the bow section of the wreck.

WRECK SECRETS

I HAD HEARD WHISPERS about the quality of diving in Croatia, and when good friend Gerard Punch announced that he was arranging a trip there, I jumped at the chance to join in.

Gerard had researched the possibilities and decided that we should go to Diving Shark Croatia, a PADI 5* centre based in Medulin, Istria in the north of the country. The intention was to explore the numerous deeper wrecks visited by the dive-centre, which could offer a full-service technical centre and a catamaran with diver-lift.

Getting to Medulin was not difficult. Pula, a small and interesting city, has its own airport and several low-cost UK airlines fly there. I am Bristol-based, so was delighted to find that Thompson flew there direct on Saturdays.

It was only after the flights were booked and paid for that I realised that Thompson appears to have a more restrictive baggage allowance than other low-cost carriers. The most I could book was 30kg of bags plus a 20kg sport bag (15kg + 5kg on presentation of a dive cert), totalling 50kg. Thompson has a cabin-bag limit of just 5kg.

By comparison, Easyjet allows 60kg of booked bags and no weight restriction on cabin bags. I was diving with a rebreather (the dive-centre had cylinders) and drysuit and would need to take my basic dive plus camera equipment.

Normally my total weight comes in at about 70kg, and I am more than happy to pay for the extra weight, but Thompson would not give me that option.

I HAD NO IDEA HOW I would get everything to Croatia, but was eventually saved when an extra diver joined the trip at a late stage.

He would be driving from the UK, so kindly allowed several of us to load a bag into his car. I had learnt a lesson – check weight limits before booking.

I could have saved weight by hiring a drysuit, and the centre has manifolded 12-litre twin-sets for those happy blowing bubbles. All its equipment was in good condition and looked well-maintained.

From the airport we were taken straight to the dive centre, just 20

minutes away, and greeted by owners Valentina and Davor. We were encouraged to assemble our kit and fill and analyse the gases for our rebreathers and were briefed on the next day's diving (everyone spoke good English).

The following morning we loaded the heavy gear onto a trailer that was taken the short distance to the quay, where the boat was waiting. The first dive was to be a bit of a try-out in 48m, not one of the dives planned by Gerard but the Italian destroyer *Cesare Rossarol*, lost just after the end of WW1 while trying to negotiate a known minefield.

A massive explosion split the ship in two and she was gone in just three minutes. It was one of the greatest WW1 tragedies for the Italian Navy, with 98 of its sailors lost. The two parts lie about 400m apart, and we would be diving the stern section.

After diving all summer in the UK, the gin-clear Adriatic water was a treat. I was one of the first on the wreck, and the two guns, an interesting rangefinder and a complete ship's wheel at the auxiliary steering position were a treat to see.

What was disappointing was that the visibility quickly went from sparkling to thick fog as the silt was stirred up by numerous divers trying to get a good look around a small wreck on which there was little current.

Now I knew that all the kit was working well, but a second reef dive was available and I took advantage of this to see a pretty vibrant reef made up of a


succession of steps down to about 35m with good, colourful fish life.

Back in the shallows a trial of different scooter models involved 10 minutes learning the skills to control and ride devices that are so heavy and awkward at the surface but which take movement below it to a different level – and are great fun.

The next day gale-force southerly winds stopped all dive activity, so we explored Pula, which has an almost intact Roman amphitheatre as well as a go-kart circuit where we got our adrenaline fix for the day. Medulin too is well served by inexpensive and good-quality restaurants.

ALTHOUGH STILL WINDY, we were able to dive the following day, though limited to the bow section of the *Cesare Rossarol*, at the same depth as the stern section and in similar silty conditions – enjoyable, but not what we had come this far to see. It isn't just the UK where the weather causes problems.

After this, the weather looked up. It wasn't perfect but we would be able to do what we wanted. The dive-centre suggested that we plan on two dives a day to make up for lost time. We would take the boat south, then north-east to the small town of Plomin Luka, and base ourselves there for the next two days.

Now the quality of the diving moved to a different level. Our next dive was to be the Glasgow-built cargo vessel *Vis*, lost just after WW2 on 13 February, 



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Above left: The bridge of the *Vis*, with funnel still in place behind.

Left: Deck ventilator forward of the bridge.

Above right: The bow of the *Vis*.

swaying and shimmying fish that gradually parted to reveal the wreck.

The shotline was attached to the anchor-winch at the bow – all the wrecks we dived that week had permanently fixed lines, easy to create in the tide-free Adriatic and respected by all the users.

The *Vis* is one of the most intact wrecks I have seen. Its various deck levels are easy to move around, and it is a bit tight but not unreasonable to get into the engine-room.

Watch the silt here, but on the whole this is a clean wreck with a lot of intact superstructure, including the funnel.

THE BRIDGE AREA IS EASY to examine, and the plinths for the compass binnacle and ship's wheel remain. Through the bridge windows I watched fish rather than the miles of ocean passing as they would have done in the ship's heyday.

I went aft, dropping over the stern to check out the prop before returning to deck level and slowly making my way forward again. Visibility was in excess of 30m, except where the fish got in the way!

Then it was back to the shotline for decompression. It was important for all divers to return up the line, but this arrangement did mean that it could be a

bit unstable, especially while trying to maintain depth on deco.

I found it easier to send up a DSMB from the shallows and remain in comfort, because there were no significant currents with which to contend.

After a leisurely lunch to give us all a decent surface interval, we moved to the *Lina*, more old British steel. Built in Newcastle and launched in 1879, she foundered in a storm in January 1914 and now lies close to shore, upright and intact. The top of the bow is in 25m, the stern in 55m. I planned to do a quick tour taking in the stern but to spend most time above 35m checking out the engine-room and forward parts of the wreck.

The bow is memorable, with the two Admiralty-pattern anchors stowed on deck. The difficulty deploying them can be understood when you can see them like this. The helm can be seen on the remains of the bridge, and it's easy to get below decks and explore the holds.

The timber cargo on closer inspection turned out to be stacks of wood veneer, the clean surface obvious when lifted.

A number of Croatian wrecks have memorials placed on them by local divers, and inside the bow of the *Lina* is such a memorial, to the ship and its

1946, after hitting a stray mine.

The 2865-tonne ship is 79m long and was built in 1921. After the occupation of Yugoslavia in 1941, ships that found themselves in British or American ports were requisitioned and the *Vis* worked in convoys along the Cuba-USA-Canada route under Allied control, returning to the UK, then onward to her home country after the war.

On the day of her loss she was heading to Rasa in Istria to load coal and was running in the channel between the Croatian mainland and the island of Cres that had not yet been cleared of mines.

Unfortunately she struck one, and now lies upright and very much intact in 60m, with her decks at around about 50m. The rear mast is intact, complete with rigging that reaches up to 37m.

The first thing I saw were shoals of

Below left: Diver Gavin Jones checks out the bridge helm of the *Lina*. It's covered in yellow sponges.

Below right: Diver Bill Reid shows the veneer strips that remain of the cargo on the *Lina*.





sailors. The wreck lies very close to shore, and if you have any deco to do it's a short swim over to some convenient caves at 5m, but the swell caused by previous high winds made such an excursion unwise.

Our overnight mooring was at the small and obviously busy fishing village with a backdrop of a huge chimney, part of a coal-fired power station.

We were driven (an hour's journey) back to the dive centre where scrubbers were changed, cylinders refilled and torch batteries put on charge for the following morning, when we travelled back.

CONDITIONS WERE THE BEST YET, and it was easy to get to the *Kalliope*, a large cargo vessel. Greek registered, this was a US-built Liberty ship formerly called the *Robert Dale Owen*. She changed hands in 1946 and became yet another victim of a stray WW2 mine on 20 December 1947, in the same channel that finished the *Vis*.

She quickly took on a list, and soon afterwards the captain ordered the crew to abandon ship.

No sooner had they got into the life-rafts than the ship broke further and slipped beneath the waves. Only one Greek sailor was lost.

I failed to listen properly to the briefing and spent my dive going around the upturned bow section, where I saw some big anchors, but that was the highlight.

About 20m away lay the rear section, and other divers reported that it lay on its port side, with a large bridge complete with telegraph and compass binnacle that could be entered.

The funnel remained in place behind the bridge, railings fenced off the whole structure and doorways into the interior beckoned, as did openings into the holds. I'll have to return for that one!

The dive centre advised against our planned dive in open sea on a wreck called the *Argo*, because the weather was forecast to worsen. Some of the team had had issues that prevented them diving the

Vis the first time, so we decided to go back there, and it was just as good.

What should have been an easy trip back to Medulin took more than an hour longer than expected thanks to increasing wind and a big broadside sea, but luckily the wind moderated for our final day and a planned single dive on what is probably the most famous dive in the area, the *Baron Gautsch*.

Built in the Dundee shipyard of Gourlay Brothers & Co, this luxury liner was launched in 1908, 84m long with a beam of 12m and just over 2000 tonnes.

She was employed along the Adriatic coast until the build-up to WW1, when the Austro-Hungarian navy requisitioned her as a troop-carrier.

She was lost early in the war on 13 August, 1914, when Captain Paul Winter ignored communications from the navy minelayer *Basilisk* that she was laying mines to protect Pula and should stay clear. *Basilisk*'s sailors watched in horror as they realised that the beautiful liner

Above: Diver and large anchor on the upturned bow section of the *Kalliope*.

was sailing directly towards the mine barrier they had just deployed.

A massive explosion sealed the liner's fate, and just a few minutes later the bow rose and she slipped beneath the waves. Of those on board 159 were saved but 177, including many women and children, were lost. The captain was arrested but the outcome of any investigation is unknown.

The *Baron Gautsch* is not classified as a technical dive. The wreck lies upright in 40m and its decks come up to about 27m. When we arrived several other dive-boats were already present, and the first 20 minutes of the dive were in diver soup.

I prefer to have wrecks to myself and the numbers of others present did spoil the experience for me. There are several different deck levels and the engine-room can be explored, and although on this occasion visibility inside the wreck left something to be desired, a gentle current outside it proved helpful. Big shoals of fish swirled over the decks.

HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE roof-lights to the engine-room complete with intact glass portholes, life-boat davits and another memorial plaque, placed in 2014 on the 100th anniversary of the sinking at the stern. A steering position with wheel boss is also present. Several large red scorpionfish were spotted, and the whole structure is colonised with colourful sponges and other marine life.

I would like to dive this wreck again when fewer or no other dive-boats are present, and think it would provide an outstanding experience.

We felt we had only scratched the surface of the numerous wrecks in this part of the world. Croatia's Ministry of Culture issues permits to dive wrecks such as the Hungarian battleship *Szent Istvan*

FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▶ Rick flew Bristol-Pula with Thomson, and other budget carriers such as easyJet and Jet2 also fly direct.

DIVING ▶ Diving Centre Shark is a PADI 5* & DSAT tec centre and IANTD centre, and supplies Sofnolime, helium and oxygen as well as nitrox, www.diving-shark.hr

ACCOMMODATION ▶ Hotel Arcus is a 15-minute walk from the centre, which is itself based in a large campsite, so accommodation in air-conditioned mobile homes is available next to it.

WHEN TO GO ▶ The centre is open all year but the main diving season is from March to November.

CURRENCY ▶ Croatian kuna, euros widely accepted.

HEALTH ▶ Nearest recompression chamber in Pula.

PRICES ▶ Return flights cost Rick £400 (with 50kg of baggage), seven nights' B&B 262 euros, five days' technical diving to distant sites 500 euros (closer sites cost less). Three-litre rebreather cylinder oxygen fill, 6 euros. Heliar 10/52, 10 euros.

VISITOR INFORMATION ▶ www.istria.hr





at set times, but these did not coincide with our trip. And poor weather conditions had meant that we had to dive local wrecks that would not normally have been on the tick-list.

The dive-centre was excellent, made us welcome and provided an efficient and well-organised service, including sound advice on planning the dives.

Though we couldn't dive our planned itinerary, what we did lived up to those whispers I had heard, and all agreed that a return visit would be in order. ☐ ☒

Above: The dive-boat with lift, a comfortable ride for 10-12 tech divers.

Below: Scorpionfish hide out on a lifeboat-davit pulley on the *Baron Gautsch*.

Bottom: Plaque on the wreck of the *Baron Gautsch*, placed on the 100th anniversary of its loss in 2014.



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GUITAR SOLO

ONE OF THE GREAT THINGS about diving is that even after many years of diving, something new can suddenly turn up at an unexpected time.

On a liveaboard trip aboard *Similan Explorer* (run by Similan Diving Safaris in Khao Lak, Thailand) we always start the trip with an easy check dive.

On this occasion we did this at Koh Chi in the Surin Islands. After jumping in for the early morning dive I was shadowing the group, taking a few photos of the coral and anemones.

I didn't expect to see much out of the ordinary – just the usual reef fish or perhaps one of the resident turtles or sting rays.

Next thing I saw something large swimming in the gloom. It was swimming towards me, above the granite boulders, and as it came closer I saw that it was a bowmouth guitarfish – my first sighting of one ever!

It swam right over the top of me, then turned and came back to me – seeming to check me out. Possibly I was the first scuba diver it had seen, so it was as curious of me as I was of it. Then it turned and sped away into the deep.

The bowmouth guitarfish (*Rhina ancylostoma*) is a type of elasmobranch (the group that includes sharks and rays), but is the only member of the family *Rhinidae*. Its fins resemble those of sharks, but the gills are located on the underside, as with rays.

These large fish (growing up to 2.7m long, this individual was approx 2m) are found in the coastal areas of the Indian and western Pacific Oceans. They are more active at night, feeding on fish and crustaceans.

They are uncommon throughout their range, and listed as Vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

As such, encountering one under water takes a bit of luck. My entire encounter lasted only about 20 seconds, but left me with photos and memories that I'm sure will last a long time!



Many divers would agree that the best underwater experiences are those you don't see coming.

RICHARD CAREY has just had one of those experiences in Thailand







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Expect a warm welcome from Crazy Joe and the gang when you hit this island off Honduras, says
MICHEL LABRECQUE

THE OTHER ROATAN

FOR MANY DIVERS, the approach of winter chimes in with choosing a destination for the next diving holiday. Year after year, the same questions arise. Where to dive without breaking the bank, while still logging a good number of dives on interesting and diverse sites?

For those travelling with a non-diver, the variety of topside attractions is also a consideration. The quality of beaches comes into play, as well as the places to visit and thing to see.

The Caribbean island of Roatan off Honduras has become a hit destination with US divers for all of the above reasons and more. Resorts located on the western side of the island have become very popular with divers.

The downside is that sites are sometimes crowded, with numerous dive-boats vying to visit top and nearby

sites during peak travel periods in the Caribbean. The west side of the island is also exposed to dominant winds, and blown-out days are a more frequent occurrence.

For those who want to dive the waters of Roatan but prefer less-busy dive-sites, its north side provides quiet and protected bays. While on this Bay Island I chose to stay at the Turquoise Bay Dive & Beach Resort, an intimate place with its own private beach and on-site dive centre.

What I found were well-preserved dive-sites and easy diving conditions. Given the presence of the dive-centre mere metres away from the resort's main building, no daily transfers are required, and short boat-rides get you to most of the sites.

A bonus is that the location is isolated in the middle of the north coast, so other dive operations rarely venture to its sites. Ours was the only boat on the reef on each of the

dives we logged during the week in this section of the island.

Should conditions get rough or should you want to explore to the west or south, the centre's staff will provide land transport to their second location in front of French Cay, from which all popular sites can be accessed.

Roatan boasts more than 150 named dive-sites. On the morning of my first dive, I head to the dive-centre and am directed to the boats. The staff has already transported and assembled my equipment, so a quick check and we're ready to go.

The boats are large enough to accommodate 16 divers but the number is limited to eight for added comfort. On most of the days I went out, we numbered between four and six divers. 🐢

Pictured: This hawksbill turtle pays no attention to nearby divers.

We descend on a site named Sponges because of the large number of barrel sponges along the wall. Many of these are huge, and on closer inspection prove to host many small creatures such as sharknose gobies foraging for food.

At Labyrinth the reef blows us away, because the coral is spectacular. A series

of connecting crevices, some more than 10m deep, have been carved through the reef. Divers can follow the winding paths while observing a variety of reef fish.

The coral plateau is an ideal place for a safety stop that seems to fly by. I take in the scenery and watch French angel

and other fish cruising atop the reef.

The second day of diving starts on the 70m-long *Aguilera* wreck, intentionally sunk in 1997. Originally intact, it broke apart during Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and now lies in three sections, many of which are penetrable with the proper equipment and training.

This site is always a favourite given the number of fish found on the wreck. Black grouper are abundant, and quick to swim up to divers.

TIME FOR A NIGHT-DIVE, and a five-minute boat-ride places us over Turquoise Channel. As soon as I reach the bottom I find the usual night-dive creatures – shrimps, lobsters and crabs out to feed.

Near the end of the dive, a fellow-diver points out a sculptured slipper lobster – a great find, as these are rarely encountered. After posing for a few shots, it retreats behind a boulder.

I am heading for the anchor-line when I spot a Caribbean reef octopus perched on a coral head. It stays there for several

Below & bottom: The *Aguilera* wreck plays host to black grouper; the wreck now sits in three sections.





minutes, seemingly content to observe us without feeling the need to camouflage its appearance. Houdinis of the reef, octopuses often prefer to retreat into minuscule crevices. It's a good 80-minute dive.

Over the following days, I dive some of Roatan's well-known dive-sites such as Rockstar which, located on the north coast, rivals many of the south's popular sites.

The divemaster briefs us on the presence of the star attraction, a very friendly and audacious green eel he calls Crazy Joe. It's easy to recognise as it has only one eye, and resembles a character from *Pirates of the Caribbean*.

During the dive, the moray repeatedly swims between the legs of one of the divers. Busy looking at the coral, he never realises that he has made a new acquaintance. Getting no attention, Crazy Joe decides to swim away.

We turn our attention to Eagle Ray, popular of course for the presence of the beautifully ornate *Aetobatus narinari* but offering much more besides. Everywhere I look there are fish or critters. A balloonfish glances at me while I'm photographing a seastar. Later, an

Above: Caribbean reef sharks are present in numbers at the Cara a Cara dive-site.

Left: A scultured slipper lobster is a rare find in Roatan.

Below: Green moray eels are abundant – you find at least one on every dive.

intrigued group of Creole wrasse pay me a visit. In their terminal phase, they display amazingly vivid colours.

A careful inspection in the sand reveals legions of various hermit crabs. On the reef, flamingo tongues devour gorgonians while chromis zip by.

GIVEN MY FASCINATION with sharks, Cara a Cara is on my dive-site bucket-list for the week. Spanish for “face to face”, this is a high-adrenaline dive. The descent is somewhat challenging, as current is usually present on this site, but that's why the sharks are there.

Divers settle on the sandy bottom with their backs against a small coral wall so that they don't need to be concerned about too-friendly underwater fellows coming up behind them.

The divemaster carries a smelly bucket of chum to attract the sharks, but they are not fed, unlike many places in the Caribbean.

Within minutes, Caribbean reef sharks surround us. I estimate that there must be more than 20 of them, because I manage to count 14 in a single frame.

They come in very close and give every indication of curiosity about



the divers, so it's easy to understand why those divers have wide smiles on their faces when they surface.

Later that afternoon I dive Mary's Place, regarded as Roatan's premier dive site. Famous for its healthy coral, particularly its black coral, it doesn't disappoint. The wall is covered and I spot many species of reef fish.

I can't resist approaching a hawksbill turtle busy grazing on algae. It pays no attention to me, but eventually heads to the surface to breathe.

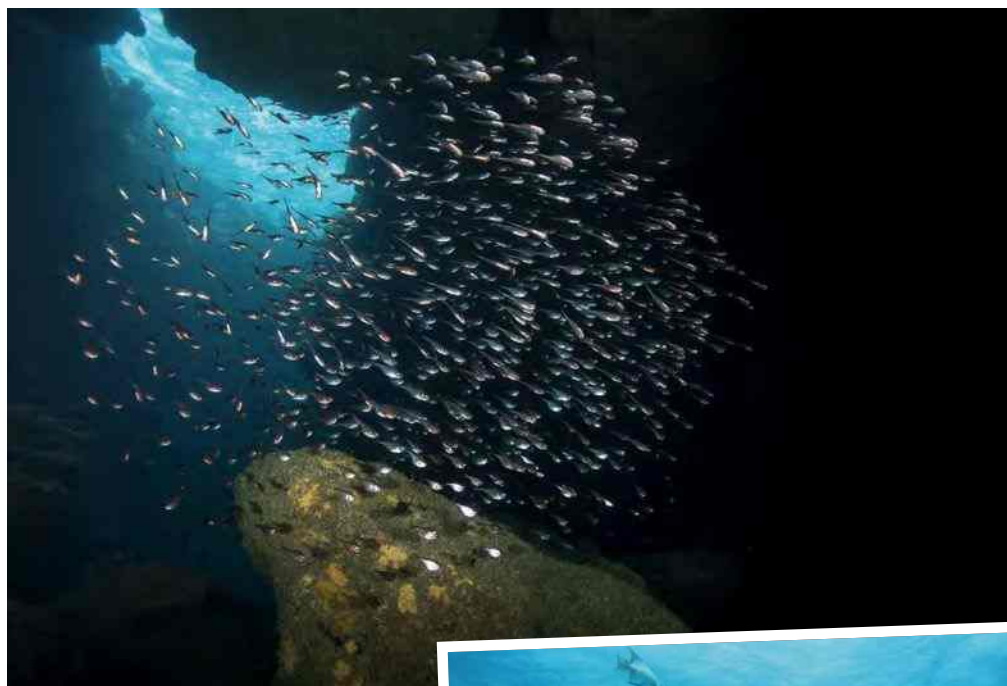
Earlier in the week, I had explored a site named Underground, and want to dive it a second time, given the beauty and complexity of the rock formations.

We follow a lengthy tunnel under the reef. Along the way, rays of light penetrate the darkness through exit-points and skylights, and the contrasts are spectacular. The presence of large schools of glassy sweepers adds to the show, their silvery sides seeming to dance under the beams of our dive-lights like underwater fireworks.

UNDERGROUND WOULD SEEM

a fitting end to a great week's diving, but the ocean has a last surprise for me. During the safety stop, I spot a large school of blue tang frenetically covering every corner of the reef, stopping here and there to chew on coral-heads. Then I notice a shadow off in the distance, a few metres from the surface.

Curious, I swim towards it to investigate. It's an impressive school of Atlantic spadefish, gently swaying with each pulse of the ocean. I prolong the dive by 20 minutes, swimming alongside them. Far from timid, some of them rub against my fins several times, perhaps trying to rid themselves of parasites.



Above: Like fireworks, glassy sweepers dance under the divers' lights at Underground.

Right: The dive at Underground ends with an encounter with very friendly Atlantic spadefish.

Below: Turquoise Bay is protected by dominant winds, which allows for very easy diving conditions.

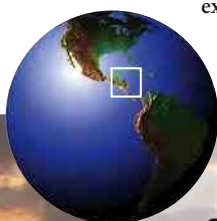
I left Roatan with the impression of much left to explore. I ran out of time to dive with the dolphins and there are many more sites and wrecks to explore.

Topside, Punta Gorda is worth a visit. The little village has a festival atmosphere every Sunday afternoon, when the locals play music and dance in the streets.

In the laid-back Caribbean, you need no excuses to enjoy life!

Unable to dive on the last afternoon

of my stay given my upcoming flight, the resort's manager sets up a tour of the island. I make my way to West End to spend some time on the beach, visit the town and watch the sunset.



FACTFILE

GETTING THERE ▶ The international airport is Juan Manuel Galvez and flights are via US hubs and El Salvador. A departure tax (US \$37) is usually included in airline tickets but double-check. Most resorts are a 30-minute drive from the airport – check transfers included.

DIVING & ACCOMMODATION ▶ Subway Watersports is a PADI 5* Instructor Development Centre (www.subwaywatersports.com) at Turquoise Bay Resort, www.turquoisebayresort.com

WHEN TO GO ▶ Average year-round temperature 28°C, with the trade winds providing a gentle breeze. Relative humidity averages 72%. Water temperature ranges between 25-27°C October-March and 27-29°C April-September. High season is October-February.

MONEY ▶ US dollars (up to \$20 denomination bills) are used as much as the local currency but many businesses will give you change in lempiras. Euros are also commonly accepted.

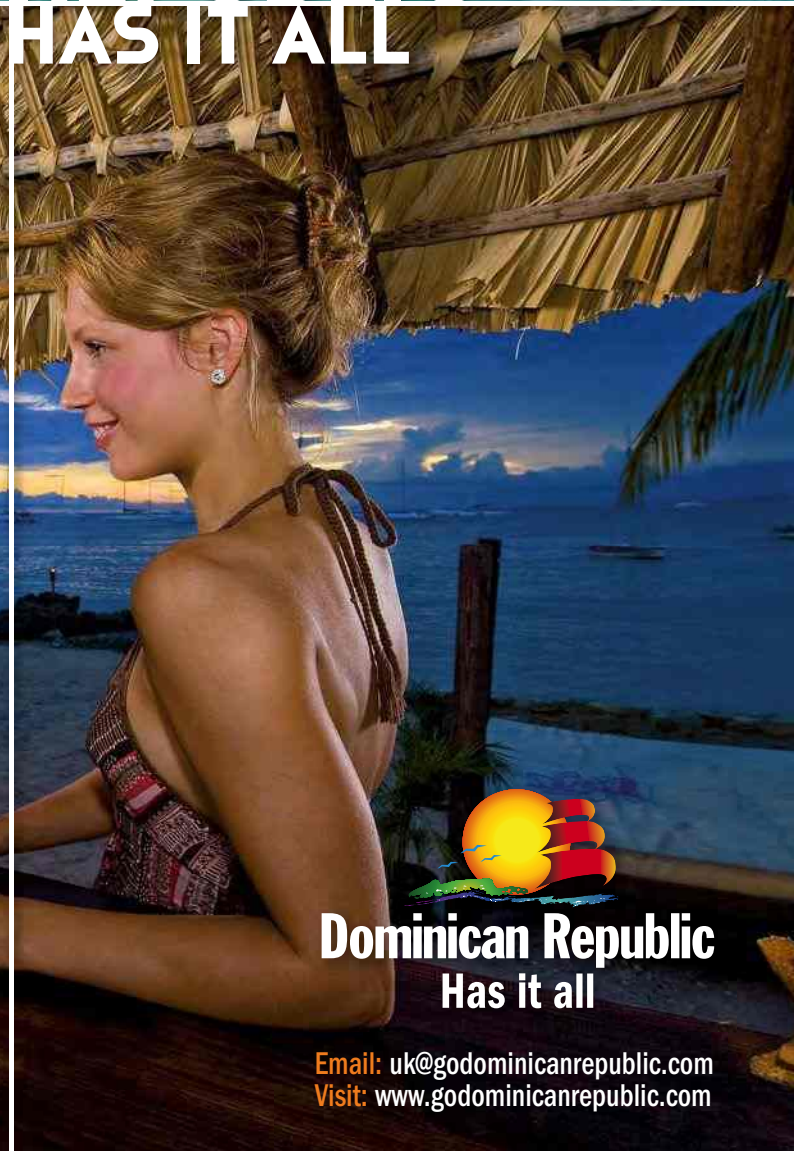
HEALTH ▶ Bring insect repellent.

PRICES ▶ Return flights from £440. Car hire £35 a day. Turquoise Bay offers seven-night dive packages from \$949pp (low-season, two sharing), including all meals, transfers, wi-fi with three dives a day and a night-dive.

VISITOR INFORMATION ▶ www.tourismroatan.com



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC HAS IT ALL



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THIS MONTH'S COLUMN has been sparked by what can only be described as a heroic death. Words such as "heroic" and "legendary" are idly and frequently used in today's sound bite society. How many times have we heard of a sportsman's performance being "heroic", or of "legendary" play in the face of several millionaires in silky shorts running at each other, passing a spherica toy between them?3

But the actions of this man were heroic and legendary in every sense of the words – a genuine hero in the way he lived his life, and the way he met his death.

I'm referring of course to Henry Worsley. I read his obituary in *The Times*, and at the end it simply said "Henry Worsley – Soldier and Explorer". There are worse epitaphs.

His name marches on of course, in the form of the considerable sums that are still being donated to the Endeavour Fund, set up to help wounded Servicemen.

His name also sits easily among the pantheon of truly great explorers. The fact that he died attempting to complete his goal gives the entire episode a surreal sense of Victorian melodrama.

CLIMBERS ASIDE, we have become used to our explorers coming home (high-altitude mountaineers of course seem to still occupy a world of genuine, unpredictable peril). Henry may have expired in a Chilean Hospital, but he actually died on the ice, pushing his body beyond the point where even modern medicine could come to his aid.

Driven on by what was plainly an implacable will, he marched his malnourished frame to a point of no return. And it is this latter point that fascinates me. He was an experienced man, a career in the SAS and several extraordinary expeditions behind him.

He would have known his body intimately, sensing at some level, I'm sure, that he had passed a point of no return, and yet he pushed implacably on.

I hasten to add that it appears to have been peritonitis that killed him, and there is speculation that the two days in which he lay in his tent awaiting rescue may have had a critical impact as the infection set in, but nonetheless he had willingly pushed his body into a physiologically ruinous state.

It was an effort of will and dogged tenacity the rest of us mortals can only begin to comprehend.

There is also the possibility that he kept going, desperately ill, because his ultimate goal was so close. He was evacuated from the ice a mere 30 miles away from the end of his trek, with 930



'It's always worth listening to that little voice'

miles already passed under his skis. This is a heartbreaking figure, and should give us all pause for thought.

Backing out before it's too late. It's a short, simple sentence, and yet packed with complex psychology.

There are many things that drive us into a dangerous situation – peer pressure, the lure of a goal that seems so tantalisingly close, or the genuine thrill

reinforcement of "beating the system" making me feel somehow that I'm a better diver for it.

Well, I'm not. No-one beats the system forever – it always wins in the end.

THERE IS EVERY CHANCE that Henry Worsley – a truly extraordinary man – got unlucky, and the combination of exhaustion, infection, and being tent-bound for several days led to his untimely death.

But I'm sure he would be the first to say that it is always worth listening to that little voice – even if it gives you pause for thought, makes you stop and think hard about what you are about to do and where you are about to go.

Momentum and adrenaline are powerful creatures, dragging you along in their wake, but amid the deafening clamour of their clattering hooves it is always worth listening for that whisper of warning.

I have in the past utilised a rather clumsy "rule of thirds" approach to this.

Not in the classic cave-diver's sense (a third for the route in, a third for the route out, and a third for any dramas). No, my rule is slightly simpler.

If three things don't feel quite right, or three things go wrong (small things – a "fin-strap-breaking, O-ring-blowing, regulator-freeflowing" level of snags), then that wee voice kicks in and tells me that this dive might not be my dive, that this day might not be my day.

Henry's death was tragic indeed, but I'm sure that if the lessons from it result in one person saving themselves as they push their own limits, then he would have been the first to raise one gloved thumb in support as he marched into legend.



Above: Explorer Henry Worsley, who died in the Antarctic in January.

of exploration.

But there is also a point at which you should turn back. It's happened to me on many a dive, a little voice that tells me I'm on the edge of my comfort zone, at the limits of my ability, or entering an environment in which my kit or my training might not suffice.

And yet, looking back through my diving career, there has been many a time when I've pushed on regardless. And I've got away with it – the negative

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC HAS IT ALL



Comfortable water temperatures of 75-82°F (25-29°C) allow for year-round snorkeling and scuba diving in the Dominican Republic. Visibility is generally an underwater photographer's dream.



The ultimate experience for a privileged few will be to dive with the humpback whales in the Silver Banks area off the North Coast. But for the less adventurous there are dives to coral heads, reefs, canyons, walls, caves, natural and artificial shipwrecks, some dating back to the 16th century.

Experts recommend the dive spots in Puerto Plata, Espaillat and María Trinidad Sánchez provinces, in Samaná on the north coast, and off Boca Chica, Juan Dolio and La Romana on the south coast.

Catch the diving bug in the Dominican Republic by signing up for a scuba diving certificate at one of the many dive shops located at resorts or in beach towns. There are courses for the diver-to-be and for serious aficionados, including night and cave diving. If you are already a diver, use your advanced skills to explore the deeper wrecks and walls.

Many excursions are open to visitors who will go snorkeling and scuba diving on the same trip. These trips will often take tourists to explore paradise-like beaches that are not easily accessible by land.

Take note that all-inclusive hotels are perfect for the diver who has other non-diver responsibilities such as children, spouse or significant other who does not dive. Even if both parents dive, the children will be in a totally controlled and entertained environment while you are diving making the Dominican Republic great place for a vacation with diving.



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Sharks of southern Africa

Oonasdivers has rethought its southern African shark diving tours, which now combine time spent in Umkomaas to dive Aliwal Shoal in South Africa with a scenic land transfer to Ponta do Ouro, Ponta Malongane and Ponta Mamoli in Mozambique, where the rest of the trip is spent diving.

The tour operator can also offer extensions such as great white shark diving from Gansbaai or a three-night Big Five safari in Hluhluwe-Imfolozi, South Africa's oldest game reserve.

The tours can be tailored to a guest's requirements, but sample prices for a seven-night Sharkweek are £1425pp, nine nights £1495, and 11 nights £1795 (two sharing). These prices do not include flights.

► www.oonasdivers.com

THE RIGHT PEOPLE

"Volunteering... has been criticised heavily in recent years, and for good reason," says one well-known volunteering provider, Biosphere Expeditions, which reckons charlatans are getting the business a bad name. "But wildlife conservation voluntourism is different when it is organised by the right people," it goes on.

One of several scuba-diving expeditions Biosphere is organising this summer takes place on a Maldives liveaboard yacht from 9-15 July and enables existing divers to train as Reef Check EcoDivers and help marine biologists study and protect coral reefs and resident whale shark populations.

You make your own way to Male, and the trip costs £1630.

► www.biosphereexpeditions.org

Serenity and cheap deposits

Emperor Serenity, now operating in the Maldives, can carry 26 guests in 13 *en suite* air-conditioned cabins over three levels. The liveaboard is covering similar popular routes to those of sister-vessels *Emperor Voyager* and *Atoll*, including Manta Madness.

Diving is from a large *dhoni* tender, there are four dive-guides, free nitrox and a rebreather-friendly

philosophy. Non-divers get free snorkel gear and a US \$50 voucher to spend on board.

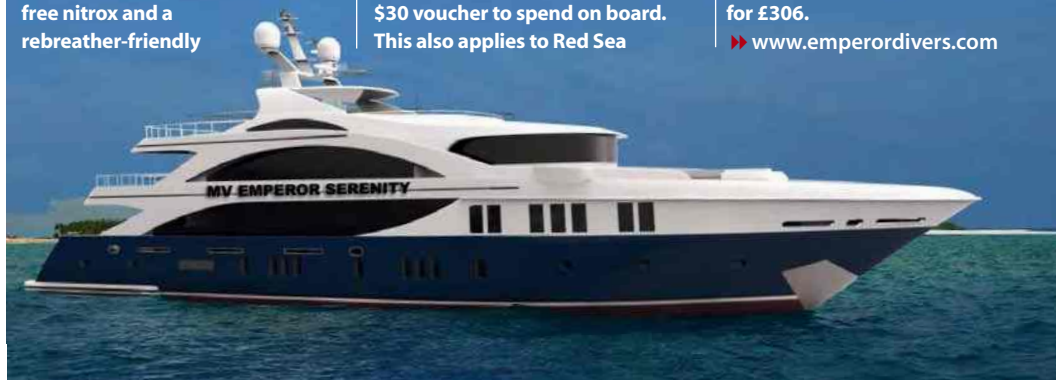
A special offer price of £1462 applies on the itinerary from 2-9 April.

Emperor Divers Maldives has now introduced a low-deposit scheme that allows guests to reserve a place for £80 and get a \$30 voucher to spend on board. This also applies to Red Sea

liveaboards, but with a \$20 voucher.

Another new Emperor initiative in the Red Sea is its "All-In" boat-dive package deal in Marsa Alam. Book three or more days' diving and you get lunch and drinks, third dives on some days, daily environmental tax and nitrox for £202, or book five days (13 dives) for £306.

► www.emperordivers.com



FIJI AT A DISCOUNT

Fiji is famed for its soft corals, reefs and varied marine life – including sharks – says Dive Worldwide, which is offering a £160 discount on a week at Uprising Beach Resort.

This resort is in Pacific Harbour and offers ready access to world-famous shark-diving site Beqa Lagoon, where bull, whitetip, blacktip, nurse, lemon, grey, silvertip and occasionally tiger sharks can be seen in numbers.

Accommodation includes traditional *bures* as well as a budget option for single divers – a 10-bunk-bed dormitory. There is a pool, restaurant, bar and diving with Aqua-Trek, the well-known centre that has set up two shark reserves.



If you don't have time to use the discount (you have to book by the end of February and take the trip in March) the standard 10-night package

price is £2745, including flights, transfers, B&B accommodation and 14 dives (six of them shark dives).

► www.diveworldwide.com

So keen

Even as flights to Egypt's Sinai were becoming problematic, Monarch was launching a new route to Israel's Red Sea resort of Eilat (Ovda Airport), promoting the move with a couple of dive-gear-clad travellers looking like plonkers at the Luton Airport check-in. Monarch's return flights to Eilat start from £99.

► www.monarch.co.uk



Good for the whole year

Atlantis Dive Resort in Puerto Galera in the Philippines is set to continue its "book one, second guest gets 50% off" special offer for arrival dates until the end of 2016.

Puerto Galera is 100 miles from Manila on Mindoro Island and offers more than 40 prime coral-reef dive-sites at the heart of the Coral Triangle, says the resort.

► www.atlantishotel.com

PALAU SIREN BACK IN ACTION

After a four-month refit following the incident last August in which the *Palau Siren* struck a reef and was severely flooded as a night dive was underway, the liveaboard was set to return to action in February. Worldwide Dive & Sail says bookings can be made for trips from June.

WWDS says it has been working with Sam's Tours Unique Dive Expeditions to come up with new

itineraries, including Full Moon trips, in which guests can experience tens of thousands of red snapper rising from the depths to mate while changing their colours from red to white, and New Moon trips on which hundreds of bumphead parrotfish conduct their own mating dance.

These aggregations also attract bull and oceanic blacktip sharks.

Blackwater night dives, way out to

sea, allow divers to encounter deep-sea creatures coming up from the depths to feed.

And dedicated wreck trips are another attraction, with more than 36 Japanese vessels plus aircraft having been consigned to the depths by the Americans in Operation Desecrate One during WW2.



Seven-night trips on *Palau Siren* start from 3100 euros.

► www.worldwide-diveandsail.com

Safety first, say travellers

Forty-six per cent of holiday-makers now rate safety and security as the most important factors in choosing a destination – though only 12% say they are less likely to go abroad following recent global events.

Twenty-eight per cent are in fact more likely to book an international holiday, according to a survey of 2300 people undertaken by travel insurance specialist Holidaysafe.co.uk.

Travellers rated "value for money" as the second most important factor, with a third ranking it as the most important. More than half of respondents reckoned fluctuating currency exchange rates were the least important factor.

► www.holidaysafe.co.uk

Temptations on YouTube

Basking Shark Scotland has released a short basking shark and wildlife film shot last summer around Mull, Coll and Tiree in the Inner Hebrides. The operator reported its best basking-shark year yet in 2015, with more than 700 sightings of sharks from April to October, as well as 1000 other cetaceans and rarely seen oceanic sunfish and a leatherback turtle.

The footage was shot by head guide Luke Saddler and owner Shane Wasik, who says: "We have high hopes to finish off the overall film this year and submit it for approval at international film festivals. In this way, we are hoping to bring the magic of the Hebrides to the whole world."

It might even inspire you to book with BSS – look for "Basking Shark Scotland 2015" on YouTube.

► www.baskingsharkscotland.co.uk



Queue for humpbacks, bull sharks sooner...

Pro Dive International has linked up with *Turks & Caicos Aggressor II* to offer a Dominican Republic itinerary that aims to get you snorkelling with humpback

whales at the Silver Bank between January and April. At that time the liveaboard is one of only a few yachts permitted access to the location.

The area provides winter shelter for North Atlantic humpbacks. Thousands gather to mate, calve and rear their young until they are strong enough to return to the north-eastern US coast.

The experience will be combined with a "dive & relax extension package" at Pro Dive's centre at the Occidental Grand Punta Cana, diving at Bayahibe, Saona and Catalina islands.



Don't start packing your snorkel just yet – there are only a few places in January 2017 and then it's on to 2018. A seven-day trip with 4-5 days of whale interactions costs US \$3295pp.

Pro Dive Mexico meanwhile has introduced what is a bit of a mouthful, the PADI Bull Shark Diving in Playa Del Carmen Distinctive Speciality. There is a classroom session and two open-water dives. Instructors communicate under water using full-face mask units to students on normal-mask receivers.

► www.prodiveinternational.com

...TAKE TIME OUT IN A TENT

Elsewhere in the Aggressor universe, the *Sri Lanka Aggressor* liveaboard begins operations in early September, and promises spectacular Indian Ocean wreck and reef-diving.

An introductory offer of US \$2500pp has been set for a seven-night trip, and also now available are £1500 four-day stays on the mainland before or after the week at sea at the Aggressor Tented Safari Lodge.

The price includes all food and beverages, daily "Jeep Safaris" to the nearby Wilpattu and Minneriya

National Parks and visits to World Heritage Sites. The lodge accommodates 26 guests in 13 air-conditioned "tents" with hard floor, thatched roof and bathroom.

Elsewhere in Asia, from July to November the *Thailand Aggressor* returns to Burmese waters with a new seven-night itinerary out of Ranong in Thailand, travelling north to dive areas such as Black Rock. Introductory \$800 discounts on the \$3290 seven-night rate apply on selected weeks.

► www.aggressor.com

Santorini – for rock fans

The Greek island of Santorini is characterised by its geological variability with white, black and red beaches, volcanic sand and rocks of different strata and colours.

Scuba Hellas rates it as a diving destination, with spectacular caves and wrecks though what sounds

like limited marine life.

It is offering a seven-day holiday there from 1315 euros pp, which includes 10 guided dives, six nights' B&B in Perivolos (two sharing), transfers, island tour, farewell dinner and taxes.

► www.scubahellas.com

Great content, but a hard book to follow

Beyond Blue
by Nuno Gomes
& Olo Sawa

"MY WORST NIGHTMARE had come true. A total silt-out at the bottom of a very deep cave with a slack guideline while on all fours and under the influence of nitrogen narcosis. I also had helium tremors... I was stuck in the mud, with half of my lights out, twelve hours from the surface and with no visibility."

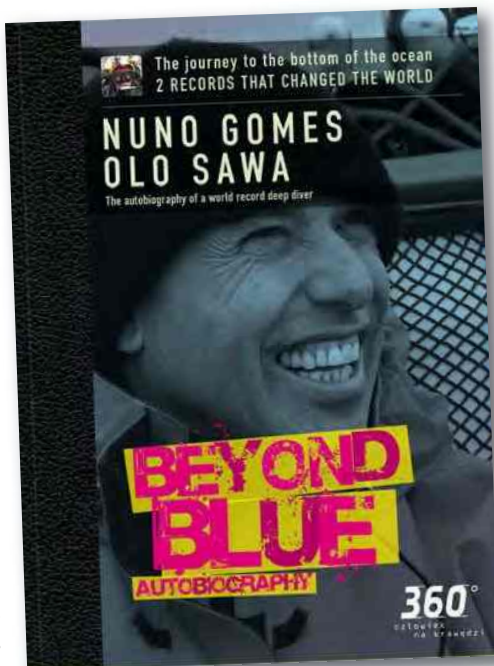
South African mega-diver Nuno Gomes is 63 and looking back on his diving highlights and lowlights. Among many other achievements he set the Guinness World depth records for cave-diving (292m, at altitude in Boesmansgat in 1996) and overall at sea (318m, at Dahab in 2005, a record overtaken only last year). Both dives took more than 12 hours to complete in extremely challenging circumstances.

So this is a survivor with an amazing story to tell. And his success and survival appears, on the evidence of his new book, to be the result of scrupulously careful planning, fitness, discipline and total obsession with diving. Luck might have played its part, but Gomes' aim was always to minimise the unexpected.

"What for a lay person is looked upon as a daredevil act is usually the end result of very careful planning and years of experience," he says. But his career was waypointed by the deaths of far too many other technical divers he knew – some great ones and others who should not have been doing what they did. All paid the ultimate price for perhaps not meeting the sort of standards Gomes demanded.

Fellow-diver Pieter Venter says his own wife kept asking why he chose a sport in which someone seemed to die monthly. "At first, I thought it's normal," he says. "Then, I met Nuno and realised that you can really achieve something without killing yourself in the process."

For someone so concerned with perfectionism, the construction of Gomes' book comes as a surprise.



To take the analogy of a cave-dive, it seems to drop straight into the main chamber but then shoot off impulsively into side corridors, go off on further tangents, dipping into the silt and shooting up to the roof before eventually finding its way giddily back to a guideline you feared you'd never see again.

The first half of *Beyond Blue* suffers most from this wildly disconnected approach, suggesting that it was written at different times but the parts never properly integrated.

The effect is disorientating, but persevere and the going does get smoother by the time the main record attempts are described.

There is so much fascinating content to be found once you get used to the choppy rhythms of this book. Technical divers will enjoy the detail but the gas-mixes, profiles and physiological effects of the dives are well described and easy enough for any diver to follow.

Gomes resorts to quoting other people talking about him when modesty prevails, and at one point a former girlfriend says: "He couldn't talk about anything else except diving. I had never met anyone who was involved in one activity to such an extent."

The book reflects this, bodybuilding being the only outside pursuit mentioned until unexpectedly, in the final chapter, the diver opens up about his background and family, and shows awareness of how his single-

mindedness might have preserved him, but at some personal cost.

Gomes is critical of one-time cave-record holder Dave Shaw for the dive-planning shortcomings that led to his death at Boesmansgat Cave. He also has a pop at author Philip Finch for then sanctifying Shaw ("uncritical applause") in his well-known book *Diving Into Darkness*.

Whatever the truth of that charge, I only wish a writer of Finch's calibre could have tackled the Nuno Gomes story, bringing his journalistic skills to bear and drilling down into what makes this outstanding diver tick.

Co-author Olo Sawa, in case you wondered, is Gomes' publisher. But with such a great story to tell, failing to engage a great writer to tell it seems a bit of a missed opportunity.

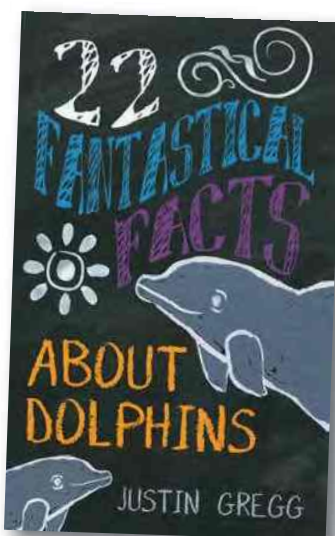
Mayfly

ISBN: 9788362827275

Softback, 263pp, US \$15

WHADDYA KNOW?

22 Fantastical Facts About Dolphins
by Justin Gregg



NOVA-SCOTIA-BASED Justin Gregg is a dolphin expert – you may have come across his book from a few years ago, *Are Dolphins Really Smart?*, after publishing which he wrote a *Deep Breath* article for *DIVER* on the subject.

Gregg is a senior research associate with the Dolphin Communication Project and a university professor – in short, few could argue that Justin Gregg doesn't know about dolphins. But he wears his learning lightly in his new pop-science book aimed at interested-teenager level, a level that suits me fine.

If you have been lucky enough to

dive with wild dolphins but are restricted by your knowledge of these mammals to telling people that it was a "really amazing experience", this quickly assimilated little book will arm you with plenty of nuggets of information with which to follow up, and not only keep your friends' attention but quite possibly intrigue and amaze them.

The concise chapters carry headings such as "Dolphins Don't Sleep", "Dolphins Use Tools", "Dolphins Can See Your Bones" and "Dolphins Communicate With Their Nostrils".

I'll leave you to fill out the details but I learnt a lot, and I reckon you'll find that an hour or so's perusal of this little book will be time well-spent.

Outside The Lines Press

ISBN: 9780994924001

Softback, 104pp, £6.99

GRAND DESIGNS

Dive and Travel Grand Cayman (ebook)
by Steve Rosenberg
& Greg Bassett

US DIVER STEVE ROSENBERG has been a photojournalist since 1980 and has produced 22 books, including Lonely Planet travel guides and hundreds of magazine articles and photos. He also says his images have won more than 250 place awards in competitions. This guy has impressive credentials.

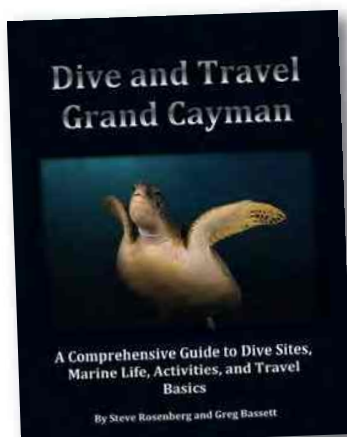
For the past few years he has worked with long-time dive-buddy, videographer and IT expert Greg Bassett to produce ebooks on diving destinations, of which this Grand Cayman title is the latest.

Rosenberg is honest enough in his preface in saying that these ebooks are as much a marketing tool for the destinations as they are a consumer guide, so don't go expecting much negativity in these pages.

This isn't an unusual approach with travel guides – what is unusual is being upfront about it.

The core of the book in any case is a guide to 75 of the Caribbean island's 250 or so officially listed dive-sites, and presumably these have been chosen because they're popular and the authors rate them, so what's to be negative about?

In fact the only downbeat note comes early on when the author draws attention to plans to build a huge cruise-ship berthing facility in



George Town Harbour – flying in the face of a new environmental-impact report that warns that the dredging process will destroy 15 acres of coral reef “and likely harm another 20 acres, home to historical dive-sites like Devil’s Grotto and the wreck of the Balboa”.

Following the well-publicised reef damage by cruise-ships in Grand Cayman recently, this project does seem singularly ill-advised – but big bucks will usually trump coral care.

I also appreciated that attention is drawn to the fact that the Turtle Farm, often promoted as some kind of conservation project, is what the name implies – it raises turtles for meat (and petting by tourists) and if it also returns some turtles to the wild this is only to maintain the meat supply in the future.

Anyway, the book is well-written, well-organised and comprehensive, starting out with the Cayman Islands’ history and climate and proceeding

logically through travel and transport, general information, non-diving attractions (including Stingray City), accommodation and eating out (with a helpful emphasis on budget dining) and general diving info.

The dive-sites are divided into those in the areas North Wall, West Wall/North-west Point, Seven Mile Beach, George Town/ South Sound and East End and cover location and topography, type of diving, highlights and marine life to expect.

On the latter topic, the dive-site section is followed by one on common marine life, again well-illustrated, and finishes with a chapter on lionfish.

A few passages about specific dive operations are printed in blue – I assume from the particularly laudatory tone that this is advertorial. The table of contents is useful and there is embedded video for those with suitable devices (you’ll find the videos on the website if yours isn’t).

It’s convenient these days to load a geographical dive-guide onto your phone, tablet or laptop, and this is a good example of a helpful and reasonably priced one. Check it out if you have Grand Cayman designs.

Rosenberg eBooks

ISBN: 9780990455738

www.rosenbergebooks.com

iBooks, GooglePlay, Kindle, 340-423pp, £5.80-£6.39 depending on platform

Reviews by Steve Weinman

TOP 10 BEST-SELLING DIVING BOOKS

as listed by www.amazon.co.uk (25 January, 2015)

1. Fifty Places to Dive Before You Die, by Chris Santella
2. Deco for Divers: A Diver’s Guide to Decompression Theory and Physiology, by Mark Powell
3. Dive: The World’s Best Diving Destinations, by Lawson Wood
4. Scuba Confidential: An Insider’s Guide to Becoming a Better Diver, by Simon Pridmore
5. Underwater Photography: Art and Techniques, by Nick Robertson-Brown
6. Neutral Buoyancy: Adventures in a Liquid World, by Tim Eccott
7. One Breath: Freediving, Death, and the Quest to Shatter Human Limits, by Adam Skolnick
8. Diving the World, by Beth & Shaun Tierney
9. Snorkelling Guide to Marine Life: Florida, Caribbean, Bahamas, by Paul Humann
10. Dive Scuba Flow, by Rod Macdonald

TOP 10 MOST WISHED-FOR DIVING BOOKS

as listed by www.amazon.co.uk (25 January, 2015)

1. Fifty Places to Dive Before You Die, by Chris Santella
2. Manual of Freediving: Underwater on a Single Breath, by Umberto Pelizzari & Stefano Tovaglieri
3. The Silent World, by Jacques-Yves Cousteau
4. Amazing Diving Stories – Incredible Tales from Deep Beneath the Sea, by John Bantin
5. Neutral Buoyancy: Adventures in a Liquid World, by Tim Eccott
6. Diver Down: Real-World Scuba Accidents and How to Avoid Them, by Michael R Ange
7. Discover UK Diving: An Introduction & Personal Guide to UK Scuba Diving, by Will Appleyard
8. Reef Fish Identification Tropical Pacific, by Gerald Allen, Roger Steene, Paul Humann & Ned DeLoach
9. The Darkness Below, by Rod Macdonald
10. Dive: The World’s Best Diving Destinations, by Lawson Wood

Quality Diving Equipment Since 1982



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WELL AND TRULY TESTED



As with the Swiss Army knife, for many of us it's hard to resist multi-functional products. NIGEL WADE tests a new dive-computer with everything but bells and whistles

COMPUTER RATIO iDIVE EASY

WHAT DO WE EXPECT FROM A DIVE COMPUTER?

I know what I want, and that's a tool to let me know what my current depth is, how deep I've been, how long I've been down and, most importantly, how long I can stay under water without any deco penalties.

Every modern dive computer does exactly that, but some models offer more, much more. The iDive Easy computer from Italian designer Ratio is being distributed in the UK by Liquid Sports and has more functions than I could wag a stick at, as I found out during a dive trip to the island of Mauritius.



Above: The iDive Easy with USB charging/data transfer cable.

Above right: In Watch mode with battery status displayed.

The Hardware

The iDive Easy is a wristwatch-style instrument with a 47mm-diameter x 16mm deep polished 316L stainless-steel case and a scratch-resistant sapphire crystal glass face. This solid case gives the computer a depth-rating of 220m.

The 40mm-diameter 80 x 80-pixel matrix LCD backlit display has oversized graphics. Menus and functions are accessed via three of four spring-loaded buttons at the 2, 4, and 8 o'clock positions, while the button at 10 o'clock activates the backlight.

A single long-life USB rechargeable battery similar to those used in smartphones and tablets powers the iDive range. Charging is done via a USB interface cable with gold-plated terminals that bayonet into the iDive's connection terminal.

The computer has an automatic sleep mode. The display is switched off if the iDive is still for five minutes, which allows for claimed battery burntimes of up to 25 hours in Dive mode, two months in Watch mode and up to six months in Total Sleep mode. As soon as the sensor detects movement, the display is switched on.

The strap is a heavy-duty silicon buckled version supplied with a separate extension for use over bulky exposure suits. The iDive Easy is available in eight colour schemes, and a Sea Jewel version with Swarovski crystals set around the periphery of the face is also available.

A dedicated nitrox analyser can be added for the entire range of Ratio multi-gas computers. This simply connects via the bayonet charging port and automatically calibrates and validates its oxygen sensor. You'll have to manually set the analysed mix into the computer, however, as

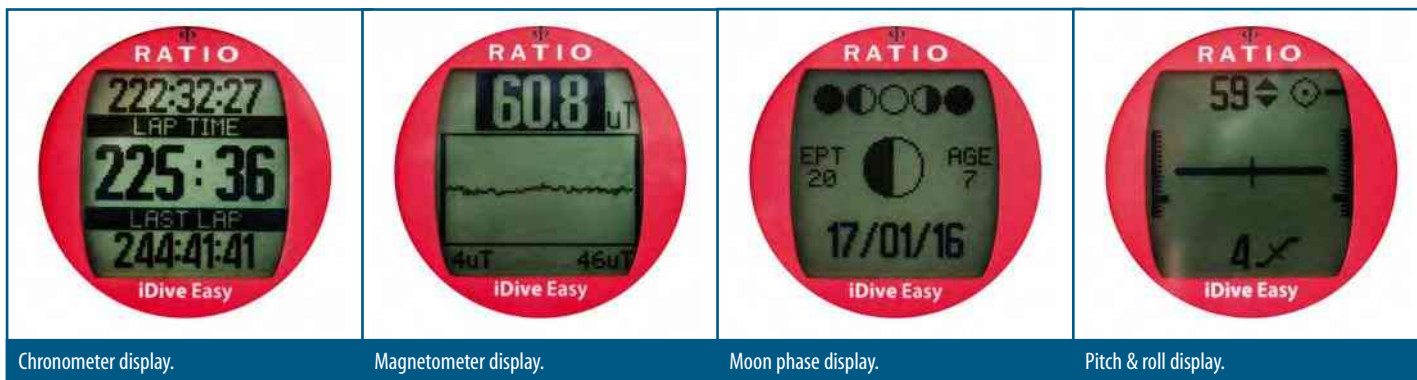
current Health & Safety rules don't allow this to be done automatically.

The Algorithm

The Easy model is a two-mix air/nitrox computer employing a real-time Buhlmann ZHL-16B algorithm to calculate tissue-saturation status and accurately and safely formulate repetitive dive-profiles. Safety-stop depths can be user-set, as can the choice of deep stops in a customisable menu system.

Modes & Functions

The iDive Easy has Air, Nitrox, Freedive, Gauge, Planning and Logbook modes, standard fare on nearly every available timepiece-style dive-computer, as are Watch and Chronometer



Chronometer display.

Magnetometer display.

Moon phase display.

Pitch & roll display.



After taking time to digest the downloaded PDF instruction manual (as best I could) and a simple, short charging process using my iPhone wall-charger, I delved into the menus to set personal parameters such as safety-stop depths, alarms and gradient factors.

I then set the contrast and brightness of the backlight and set it to stay on for its maximum duration of 30 seconds, in the knowledge that the battery could be recharged after each day's diving.

The menus were accessed with single pushes of three buttons. They're stiff and left me with sore fingers, but have the advantage of being almost impossible to activate accidentally.

Donning the computer for the first dive, I noticed that the strap was shorter than other models I've used, which meant that without the extension

strap I had to roll up my wetsuit sleeve and attach the computer around my bare wrist.

My wrists (unlike my belly) are skinny, so this was a surprise, and something chunkier divers might need to take into account.

Under water, the display was easy to read. The crisp LCD matrix had great contrast (especially when backlit) and is set out in such a way as to

make assimilating the information shown very easy.

The important stuff such as present depth and no-deco limits are displayed using big and bold fonts with the maximum depth, oxygen percentage or ambient temperature in smaller fonts. Safety-stop information when displayed was counted down in minutes and was instantly recognisable.

I tried a variety of the functions including the compass. Its display was a delight to use, showing the direction not only as large N, S, E and W letters but also in degrees.

I also used the moon-phase utility, a "nice to have" function for calculating the likelihood of clownfish and other marine species having recently laid eggs during a full moon.

I also used the pitch & roll feature to assess my orientation under water accurately (something I'm sure disciplined GUE technical divers would find useful).

Unfortunately nitrox isn't readily available in Mauritius, so I couldn't check out the gas modes or use the dedicated Ratio O₂ analyser.

Summary

This little wristwatch-sized dive computer did exactly what I expected it to do, in a no-fuss, logical manner. The standard functions can be found on virtually all of the dozens of dive instruments on the market.

In my mind it's the rechargeable battery that makes the Ratio iDive stand out from the crowd. This was apparent as my own model gave me the dreaded "Low Battery" warning a few dives into this trip, meaning that I would have to go through the inconvenience of packing it up, queuing at the Post Office and spending some money to put it right.

I did find some of the unique extras on the iDive Easy useful. No, as expected, I didn't use the pedometer, but I did use the moon phase and pitch & roll functions along with the compass.

Although I didn't get to use it, I think the addition of the dedicated O₂ analyser is genius. No longer would I have to queue to use the dive centre's well-used analyser to verify my gas mix and, unless anyone else had a Ratio, I wouldn't have to share mine either.

I don't think I'll ever need a magnetometer. Big iron-hulled wrecks are normally easy to find – but it would give me the bragging rights down the boozier. ■

SPECS

PRICE ► £375. O₂ analyser £200

TYPE ► Wristwatch, air and nitrox options

SIZE ► 47mm dia x 16mm

WEIGHT ► 140g

DEPTH-RATING ► 220m

ALGORITHM ► Buhlmann ZHL-16B

GAS SWITCHING ► No

DIVE MODES ► Air, Nitrox, Freedive, Gauge

FUNCTIONS ► Watch, chronometer, compass, barometer, altimeter, pitch & roll, moon phase, magnetometer, pedometer

COLOUR OPTIONS ► Black, white, yellow, blue, red, turquoise, purple, orange

CONTACT ► www.liquidsports.co.uk or

www.ratio-computers.com

DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★☆☆

modes. However, this dive instrument offers a further array of functions, which include a 3D self-compensating compass, an altimeter with automatic compensation for altitude diving, a thermometer and a barometric pressure gauge.

Again, these functions aren't unique in the dive-computer world but the iDive range goes beyond that and includes a current moon phase mode in which full, new, waxing and waning phases of the moon can be predicted.

Then there's a pitch & roll function indicated on both a vertical and horizontal axis and, for the diver who has everything, a magnetometer to help out if you're looking for something big and made of iron.

For the fitness enthusiasts among us there's also a pedometer to record steps, mileage and burned calories during those early-morning jogging sessions.

In Use

I dived with this instrument on an intensive seven-day itinerary and, as is usual practice with computer tests, I also took my own tried and trusted model to add a safety net should things not go according to plan.



Pedometer display.



Dive profile display.



Ratio-dedicated oxygen analyser.

FINS

CRESSI

ARA EBS

DIVE-GEAR MAKERS HAVE A FEW CHOICES

when they design new products. They can either embark on a completely new concept or they can evolve tried and tested products using new technology, new materials and new ideas.

Italian dive-specialist Cressi has been around for what seems like an eternity, as have its popular Master Frog fins. It seems fitting that such a product should receive a modern makeover, and that is exactly what Cressi has done with its new Ara EBS fins.

I took a pair with me in the pool and on an overseas trip to have a kickabout.

The Design

Ara EBS fins have a single, solid non-vented blade constructed using hi-Tec polypropylene. The blades are slightly curved downwards, with a series of low-profile channels and small ridges running along their length, and are co-moulded with a thermo-rubberised foot-pocket.

The blade is said to be a modified version of the Master Frog design. The foot-pocket has been enlarged to comfortably accommodate modern thick wetsuit booties and larger boots fitted to drysuits, making these fins suitable for coldwater use.

They are fitted with Cressi's Elastic Bungee System (EBS), which consists of hard plastic buckles, coated rubber bungees and plastic heel-pads with large grab-loops. They come in two versions – Soft Blade (SB), available in yellow, blue or silver colour schemes, or the Hard Blade (HB) model, which is available only in black. I was sent the SB model for this test.

The Tests

When I received the fins, the first thing I did was to buy a bottle of wine for my neighbour as a bribe to allow me to use his open-air swimming-pool to measure the power of these fins set against static digital scales.

With the wine consumed and permission granted, I put the Aras through the same procedure used in our last group tests (*Kickin' Back The Power*, June 2014). Finning as if my life depended on it with my BC tethered to the scales produced a reading of 21.5kg.

Let me put that into perspective. During the

group tests, and as expected, the highest reading we witnessed was 23kg from the revered Mares Avanti Plana Quattros.

The 21.5kg recorded from these Cressi fins is not to be sniffed at. It would have placed them in the top five of the 14 pairs of fins tested.

In the Water

It's all well and good testing fins in a pool, but to get a good overview of their performance they need to be taken under water in the open ocean and subjected to real-world diving.

I did this in the Indian Ocean around the island of Mauritius over the space of a nine-day excursion.

The first few dives were relaxed affairs, with little current to put the fins under any real pressure. As expected they performed well.

The foot-pockets felt broad while wearing 3mm neoprene booties, and I experienced a bit



The Ara EBS blades didn't collapse when pushed hard.

of lateral movement as I used a frogkick finning technique.

The relaxed dives were replaced with some high-adrenaline stuff a few days later when we visited La Passe du Puit, an underwater pass that channels the tidal water into a raging current.

With a bulky camera system creating drag and filling my hands I had little choice but to fin against this raging torrent of water. I was pleased to see that the Ara's blades remained firm, producing substantial thrust when needed without any signs of collapsing or twisting.

The EBS bungee straps were tight enough to keep my feet firmly planted in the foot-pockets, but not so tight as to cause any discomfort. They had the added advantage of being self-compensating as the water depth increased and the neoprene on the booties compressed.

SPECS

PRICE » All versions, £99

TYPE » Open-heel

STRAPS » Elastic Bungee System (EBS)

SIZE » S/M, M/L, L/XL

COLOURS » SB: yellow, blue and silver.

HB: black only

CONTACT » www.cressi.co.uk

DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★★★★★

The Ara EBS's curved blade.



The large grab-loop on the pliable plastic heel-pad was very easy to locate, as it protrudes at a 45° angle, making donning and doffing the fins a simple task.

Back in more sedate conditions, I lent the fins to my guide Ravin for a few dives to get some photos of them in action.

Did he like them? The fact that I caught him surfing the Internet the following evening to find out whether he could buy a pair locally answered that question.

Conclusion

I was surprised and delighted with these Cressi Ara EBS fins. After all, these were said to be a soft-blade version, but they performed in a similar way to some of the rigid-blade hi-tec fins I've worn in the past (I can't imagine how powerful the HB versions are going to be).

Using bungee-straps isn't a new idea, and other fin-makers successfully employ the same concept. Indeed, the Cressi mounting system is now standard fare, with rounded pegs moulded

into the sides of the foot-pocket, meaning that the straps are easily removed and could be replaced with generic stainless-steel spring-straps if that's the wearer's preference.

I think the larger foot-pocket is going to appeal to the Hobbits among us, or coldwater drysuit divers and those who wear thick neoprene boots.

Add this to the fins' outstanding performance and the Italians seem to have a worthy successor to their famous Master Frogs. ■

BC SCUBAPRO LIGHTHAWK

NOWADAYS IT SEEMS THAT EVERY maker of dive-kit has a lightweight travel BC in its range, and rightly so. Divers flying to tropical destinations sometimes have to deal with an allowance of only 20kg of hold baggage, and some BC models eat up more than a quarter of that weight.

These meagre weight limits make stark choices inevitable – do we sacrifice clothes and toiletries to enable us to take the same BC with which we would dive in the North Sea, or keep the essentials in the bag and pack a lighter compensator?

Scubapro has added a new version of its LightHawk wing-style travel BC to the growing market of travel-friendly dive gear. I put one in my bag for a trip abroad to try it out.

The Design

The LightHawk is a back-flotation BC designed for the travelling diver. It is made from durable 420-denier nylon and has a progressively shaped rear air-cell that's claimed to increase the wearer's range of motion and decrease drag under water.

External elastic bungee cords help to compress the air-cell when it's partially inflated, ensuring a low profile and assisting deflation. The harness has an adjustable belt-style



webbing waist-strap with a nylon buckle.

Shoulder-straps are padded at the top and have rotating quick-release buckles that swivel, allowing the wearer to route the straps under the arms.

A two-position sternum-strap is included, and this keeps the harness from slipping from the shoulders.

There are four aluminium D-rings, two at the shoulders and two on the waistband.

The backplate is flexible and padded and is fitted with a low primary tank-band with a cam-style fastening, an intermediate support-strap with Velcro closure and an adjustable yoke-strap.

Three dump-valves are fitted, one on the right shoulder and one on the right lower inner surface of the air-cell. Both are actuated with a toggle-pull and the third, on the left shoulder, is a pull-dump built into the power-inflator.

Small utility pockets are included, their closures secured with trident clips and webbing.



The LightHawk is available in three sizes, all with a lift capacity of 13.2kg in a black and grey colour scheme with white embroidered livery.

The size M/L LightHawk (excluding the supplied medium-pressure hose) I had for this test showed a total weight of 2.4kg on a set of digital scales.

In Use

My first impressions were that this BC was a minimalist's dream. The shoulder-straps pulled under my arms as they articulated on the rotating buckles, creating an uncluttered feel at the front of my body. The webbing waist-band snuggled up nice and tight, with the weightbelt-style nylon buckle locking everything in place. ■

SPECS

PRICE ► £259

TYPE ► Back-flotation

SIZES ► XS/S, M/L, XL/2XL

LIFT ► All sizes, 130N, 13.2kg

D-RINGS ► Four, aluminium

DUMP VALVES ► Three

COLOURS ► Black / grey

CONTACT ► www.scubapro.com

DIVER GUIDE ★★★★★★☆☆



The LightHawk's rotating chest buckles.

The padding on the shoulder-straps and backplate felt soft and forgiving, something I now find essential for BCs when I'm wearing a 3mm exposure suit or rash guard (my personal comfort is paramount!).

The tank-securing system held everything in position, with the two upper straps pulling the steel cylinder in line with my body.

It was interesting to note that Scubapro has deviated from its standard stainless synch-clip in favour of a nylon cam-buckle on this BC, to save weight.

Under water, the wing-style air-cell held me

in a balanced horizontal position, slightly heads-up when finning forward and comfortably vertical when hovering midwater to take photos.

Air migrated around the cell unhindered as my orientation changed. The dump-valves were perfectly positioned and the toggles were easy to find, making deflation a doddle in any position.

The elastic bungee-straps that fitted around the air-cell kept everything nicely compressed and streamlined, and helped to expel air from the dump-valves quickly.

On the surface the progressively shaped wing kept the bulk of the buoyant air-cell under water, with a smaller portion above. To my delight, this seemed to have a stabilising effect, and didn't push me forward, face-first.

The utility pockets were too small to accommodate a spare mask or a DSMB and spool. Instead, these had to be clipped to the lower two D-rings with double-ended snap-clips, my pressure-gauge and octopus-holder occupying the two on the chest straps.

Conclusion

The LightHawk is a lightweight, slimmed-down BC solidly built with good-quality materials, and at under 2.5kg it was never going to prove a problem with restricted baggage allowances.

The padding on the shoulder-straps and backplate seemed substantial, making the

whole wearing experience a joy. Couple this with the ergonomics and minimalist design concept and it all added up to a fantastic travel companion.

The lack of storage options was more of an inconvenience than a problem. I could still accommodate my standard safety kit, although it was left dangling from D-rings instead of safely nestling in zipped-up pockets.

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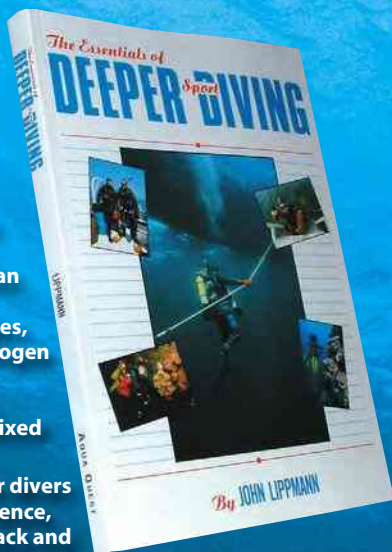
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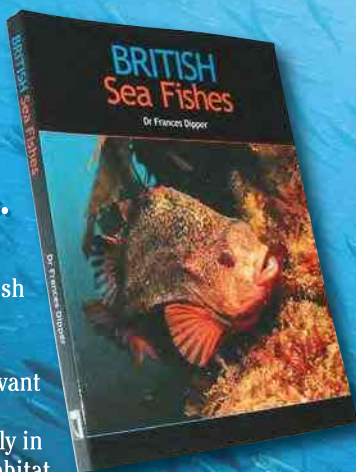
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NEW BUT UNTESTED

The latest kit to hit the dive shops

Dive Rite HunterPac BC

The latest wing-style BC from the US company Dive Rite is a hybrid design that uses a 210-denier nylon laminated doughnut-shaped bladder said to provide nearly 16kg of lift. The one-size-fits-all adjustable harness with cross-chest- and crotch-strap also has configurable D-ring mounting-points and a double stainless-steel camband tank connection. The HunterPac also features a shoulder-exhaust pull-dump and waist-level exhaust valve, and weighs in at a travel-friendly 2.81kg. It is available in the UK for £420.

► www.diverite.com



Retra LSD Ultimate

Slovenia-based underwater photography specialist Retra has upgraded its Light Shaping Device (LSD). This new version of a strobe snoot features an aluminium housing said to be 100g lighter than before and with the internal optics adjusted to improve contrast. The LSD Ultimate is compatible with Sea & Sea, Inon, Ikelite, Subtronic and Seacam flash units and costs 300 euros.

► www.retra-uwf.com



UWK SL3 L2 LED Torch

This dive-light from Underwater Kinetics is an upgraded version of its SL3, claimed to offer an increased output of 425 lumens compared to the older model's 125 lumens, and burntimes of up to 5.5 hours. A double O-ring seal on the twist-on/off bezel gives the torch a 150m depth rating. The SL3 L2 has a "corrosion-proof" ABS body, weighs 369g and is powered by 3C alkaline, LR14 or AM2 cells. Price is £59.

► www.uwk.com

IST Self-Sealing Mini DSMB & Spools

This bright orange delayed surface marker buoy is built from 210-denier TPU-coated nylon, measures 114 x 12cm and has a SOLAS reflective tape strip to enhance visibility. The DSMB can be inflated using a BC hose via a dedicated quick-release valve and deflated using an integral quick-dump valve. To complement the Mini DSMB, IST has also released a range of finger-spools, made from corrosion-proof plastics in three sizes with 15m, 30m or 50m of braided nylon line. They come with a marine-grade brass double-ended clip. Expect to pay a little under £34 for the DSMB and £9 for the 15m spool.

► www.istsports.com



SeaLife Micro 2.0 Camera

SeaLife has announced the expansion of its permanently sealed waterproof camera line with the introduction of the Micro 2.0. This new product is 4in wide, has a 2.4in rear LCD screen and is fitted with a 16MP Sony CMOS sensor capable of capturing still images or video at 1080p HD at 60fps. The camera also features a 130° wide-angle fisheye lens, is depth-rated to 200m and has built-in wi-fi. The SeaLife Micro 2.0 has 64GB of internal memory and is expandable as a system with SeaLife's Sea Dragon lights and accessories. It is priced at £429.

► www.sealife-cameras.com

Beuchat V-Twin Regulator >>>>

French manufacturer Beuchat says its new V-Twin regulator has two first-stage systems integrated in the same body, with features including a standard piston design with separate dedicated mechanisms for the main second stage and another for the second-stage octopus and medium-pressure inflator hoses. The first stage has one high-pressure and five 1p ports. The second stages have soft braided hoses, adjustable nozzles, venturi controls and balanced valves, and are said to be constructed from tough polymers. The V-Twin is available with either international (A-clamp) or DIN connections and costs 379 euros.

>> www.beuchat-diving.com



Scubapro Pyroflex Steamers & Rashguards >>>>

Scubapro's new Pyroflex range of steamers and rashguards uses a water-repellant, high-stretch 1.5mm Everflex X-Foam neoprene, claimed to dry quickly and offer maximum flexibility. The interior features a combination of fleece and plush lining for comfort. These exposure suits cost from £74.

>> www.scubapro.com



Kaiser Baas X150 Action Camera >>>>

Australia's Kaiser Baas has brought out its X150 Pro Wi-Fi Action Camera, with a high frame rate, 2.7K recording resolution and time-lapse and slow-motion capture capabilities. Wi-fi connectivity enables instant use of smart devices as a viewfinder to stream live or play back recorded footage. The camera also features a 2in digital display, black waterproof case depth-rated to 30m and a range of dedicated accessories. It costs £180.

>> www.kaiserbaas.com

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Engage brain and feel the benefit – but how best to get started? Cath Bates does the legwork

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... and other reasons to head mid-Atlantic

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The little fish that can save a dive

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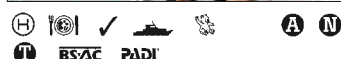
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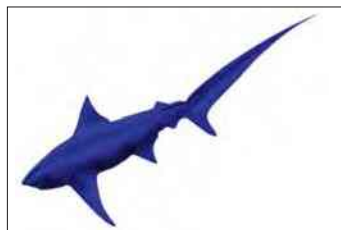
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|------|------|------|------|
| Pax | 16 | Elec | 220V |
| Cab | 8 | Cour | Y |
| EnS | Y | A/C | Y |
| Lth | 40m | Ntx | Y |
| Hull | wood | CCR | Y |

RD **CT** **DWw**
STW **AF** **DQ**

EGYPT – Sharm el Sheikh & Hurghada

South Moon

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| | | | |
|------|------|------|------|
| Pax | 20 | Elec | 220V |
| Cab | 10 | Cour | Y |
| EnS | Y | A/C | Y |
| Lth | 27m | Ntx | Y |
| Hull | wood | CCR | Y |

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| | | | |
|------|------|------|------|
| Pax | 12 | Elec | 220V |
| Cab | 6 | Cour | Y |
| EnS | Y | A/C | Y |
| Lth | 26m | Ntx | Y |
| Hull | wood | CCR | Y |

STW

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| | | | |
|------|------|------|------|
| Pax | 16 | Elec | 220V |
| Cab | 8 | Cour | Y |
| EnS | Y | A/C | Y |
| Lth | 40m | Ntx | Y |
| Hull | wood | CCR | Y |

AF **CT** **DWw**
RD **UD** **DQ**
STW

EGYPT – Sharm el Sheikh

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| | | | |
|------|-------|------|------|
| Pax | 16 | Elec | 220V |
| Cab | 8 | Cour | Y |
| EnS | Y | A/C | Y |
| Lth | 29.5m | Ntx | Y |
| Hull | wood | CCR | Y |

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| | | | |
|------|-------|------|------|
| Pax | 28-30 | Elec | 120V |
| Cab | 16 | Cour | N |
| EnS | Y | A/C | Y |
| Lth | 41m | Ntx | Y |
| Hull | steel | CCR | Y |

TSP **UD**
bo2 **DQ**

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| | | | |
|------|-------|------|------|
| Pax | 20 | Elec | 110V |
| Cab | 10 | Cour | Y |
| EnS | Y | A/C | Y |
| Lth | 37.8m | Ntx | Y |
| Hull | alum | CCR | N |

DWw
DQ

FIJI

S/Y Fiji Siren

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| | | | |
|------|------|------|------|
| Pax | 16 | Elec | 220V |
| Cab | 8 | Cour | Y |
| EnS | Y | A/C | Y |
| Lth | 40m | Ntx | Y |
| Hull | wood | CCR | Y |

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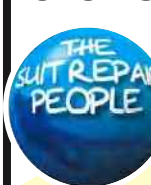
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Slough 491 BSAC; small friendly club welcomes divers at all levels. Meet at Beechwood School Fridays 19.30. Diving holidays and South Coast. Email: malcolm@uvnet.org or tel: Tony (01344) 884 596. (58382)

SOS Divers (SAA 263), Stourport, Worcestershire. Founded 1979. Friendly family club welcomes qualified and trainee divers. Own RIB. Contact Althea by email: arannie123@outlook.com (57533)

South Coast Divers (SAA 1150) Portsmouth. A friendly and active club welcomes new and experienced divers from all agencies. Email: southcoastdivers@hotmail.co.uk or call Darren: 07449 794 804. (60573)

South Queensferry SAC, near Edinburgh. 2 x RIBs, gear for hire. Pool training during the winter; trips & expeditions in the summer. Pub meeting at Hawes Inn. Call Warren: 07980 981 380. www.sqsac.co.uk (64852)

Steyning Scuba Club, West Sussex. All divers welcome. Steyning Pool, Monday evenings at 8.30pm. Contact Andy Willlett on 07786 243 763. www.seaurchinivers@hotmail.co.uk (63947)

Sutton Coldfield SAC, friendly BSAC club, welcomes all divers from trainee to advanced. All agencies. Own RIBs and compressor. Meet every Wednesday, 8.15pm at Wyndley (3.4m pool). For free try dive call Alan: 07970 573638 or Mark: 07787 106191. (64965)

Swanley Sub-Aqua Club: Friendly, active dive club with club RIB. Pool sessions Monday 9pm at White Oaks Leisure Centre, Swanley. PADI training, Open Water to Rescue Diver for members. Contact Karl: training@swanleysubaqua.co.uk (55102)

Teddington SAC at Teddington Pool, Wednesdays 21.00. Training and good social side. Diving near and far. Tel: 07951 064448 or email: deeexplorer@blueyonder.co.uk (63494)

The Bath Bubble Club SAA777 seeks new members. New and qualified divers of all agencies welcome. Weekly pool training, every Wednesday at 9pm, Culverhay Sport Centre, Rush Hill, Bath. Regular diving programme from club RIB. www.bathbubbleclubuk.co.uk (53663)

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Convenient untruths that put us at risk

That little white fib can have far-reaching consequences when underwater sport is involved, says diving doc **IAN SIBLEY-CALDER**

IT'S AN INTERESTING QUESTION to which I suppose no-one really knows the answer.

However, long before **DIVER's** own recent *Big Question* (*Medical Porkies*, January) the question: "Do patients lie to their doctors?" has been researched and come up with a resounding "YES".

A Web-based survey in 2005 came up with the following findings: 38% of patients lied or "stretched the truth" about following their doctor's orders, while 32% lied about their diet or how much they exercised.

Another 22% lied about smoking, 17% lied about sex, 16% lied about their intake of alcohol, and 12% lied about recreational drug use.

If we use these figures and extrapolate them onto the diving population, it would certainly mean that there are a lot of divers out there who do not tell the "whole truth and nothing but the truth". If this is so, why do they do it, and what effect does it have?

Various reasons have been given, including some offered by divers who responded to *The Big Question*.

Divers might not regard their medication or medical condition as relevant to diving, and therefore omit to tell the doctor. I have found that this commonly happens with medication such as painkillers and medical conditions such as asthma, but there are many others.

Often this is ignorance of the effect of the hyperbaric environment on them while diving with medication/medical conditions, and the divers are often quite shocked when they are educated.

SUCH OMISSIONS ARE OFTEN not deliberate and go hand in hand with another reason: minimalising.

"I don't take that much medication", "the condition isn't that bad", "it was so long ago" – you get the picture. The danger with this approach is that divers are not being objective and therefore are not assessing the risks properly – that is, of course, if they have enough facts to make the judgment anyway.

The final group is the outright lie. Unfortunately I think this is rife in the diving community. I have no objective research-based data, but have been around in the field long enough, both as a diver and a dive doc, to believe it to be so.

It can range from the simple failing to tick a box for hay fever, to ignoring the diagnosis of

palpitations from the cardiologist several years ago, to the very serious omission of a diagnosis that could cause death under water, such as insulin-dependent diabetes or epilepsy.

Divers, like the rest of society, have motivations to do things or not do things, and telling the truth is one of them. They may really want to start diving, but have read about the problems of diving with a condition and so know that they will run into trouble with the dive club. With the expense of a medical and the potential fail, the question is just ticked "no" so that they can start on their desired hobby.

Or perhaps an experienced diver develops a problem – well, let's just ignore that one, shall we? Who's to know? There are situations where you're just about to go on a dive holiday and become

are lying through their back teeth? Does it cause any problems?

Truth is I have no idea, but it has to be a worry. At best it's some cheap insurance, a booked dive trip and no harm done.

At worst it could mean a diver compromised under water with the side-effects of medication, or a medical condition. Then in come the risk to other divers trying to help out, to emergency services, the stress to relatives, the potential of failing to pay out insurance and bankruptcy, and even legal action.

SO IS THERE ANYTHING we can do about this? Well, first of all divers have to be educated that their medication does matter and that their medical conditions could affect them, and they should be

encouraged to get advice from doctors who know about diving, which is not always their family doctor.

I had about 20 minutes' training in medical school on hyperbaric medicine – and that hasn't changed much. Most doctors know nothing about the hyperbaric environment, and this includes consultants in hospitals.

A quick phone call or email to a UK Sport Diving Medical Committee (UKSDMC) referee will tell you if you have a problem or not – most queries are dealt with in this way, without major expense.

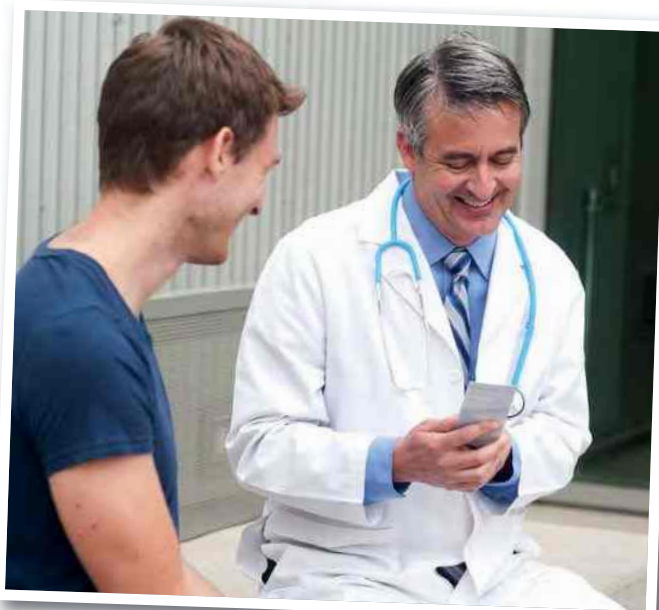
Dive clubs, organisations and instructors need to make sure they are not colluding with divers and minimising problems. After all, if it goes wrong they or you will have little on which to fall back.

Unfortunately the biggest problems seem to be abroad, and in some places money can be king. Then it is up to you – should you really take that risk and have to live, or not, with the consequences?

We're lucky in the UK to have a medical set-up that charges minimal amounts for advice – after all, UKSDMC medical referees are divers too. We love the sport and want everyone to dive who can dive, but we will not pass someone who is not safe to dive.

You may have to accept that if you want to proceed with your chosen hobby, there may be some outlay for investigations to confirm that you are fit, because they are often not covered by the NHS and have to be undertaken privately. This is however no different to several other hobbies for which expert medical advice is needed.

Use us, listen to our advice but please don't lie to us. We cannot give you the best help unless you help us.



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unwell, or start on a new medication that might affect the holiday – just ignore it and use the certificate you used before! Worry about it after the holiday – after all, it's just "easy" holiday diving, or so you justify the decision to yourself.

There is sometimes collusion by other divers, dive clubs, other diving organisations and even, and unfortunately I have come across this, by divers' own family doctor. It's not always malicious – after all, we all want everyone to enjoy the thrills and experience of diving – and it might be done out of ignorance, in which case the divers should be recommended to get advice.

More worryingly, and we have all heard the stories, it might be done for the money. In this case it is unprofessional and wrong, and could lead to legal consequences as well as danger to the diver and buddies.

So what are the consequences, if all these divers

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